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**Blaenau Gwent Effect Enterprise Facilitation®  
Project: Interim Evaluation**

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## Executive Summary

Blaenau Gwent Effect was operationally established on March 14th 2011 to provide Enterprise Facilitation® services based on the principles of the Sirolli Institute. The increasing financial hardships, lack of employment opportunities and anti-enterprising culture in the Blaenau Gwent area made it an ideal candidate for an Enterprise Facilitation® approach. Enterprise Facilitation® promotes a people-centred, bottom-up and localised approach which stimulates people to become more enterprising and pursue entrepreneurship as a career path. The belief of the Sirolli Institute is that a successful business requires three main competencies: technical ability to produce a product or service, ability to market the product or service, and ability to manage the finances of the venture, and that few individual entrepreneurs have ever possessed all three competencies. This is known as the 'Trinity of Management'®. Sirolli argues that successful entrepreneurs simply make up for their lack of a certain competency by finding a partner who possesses the skills which they lack. Consequently, the model aims to aid local entrepreneurs in becoming successful, by building teams of competence around them.

The BG Effect project was formed out of a partnership between the public, private and community/voluntary sectors. Funding from the Heads of the Valleys and Communities First programmes, Waterloo Foundation and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council was obtained to get the pilot project started. The BG Effect aims to create an enterprise culture within the local community and provide local people with an opportunity to consider self-employment as a career path. In doing so BG Effect hopes to both maintain current job opportunities, and create new employment in the local area which will aid in its future economic sustainability, and bring about a positive regenerative change. Indeed, Effect stands for Enterprise Facilitation for Effective Community Transformation. This approach is intended to sit alongside, and complement, the traditional business and enterprise support services provided by the Local Authority and other organisations.

In practice, Enterprise Facilitation® consists of two main components; an Enterprise Facilitator and a volunteer panel. The Enterprise Facilitator becomes the initial point of contact for business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, and helps them understand their specific business idea. The service is free, informal and confidential, and if the client requires any help or direction with their ideas, which the Facilitator cannot provide or secure, then the facilitator can take their case to the panel. The second element is a community panel, composed of anywhere between 20 to 60 local stakeholders, which support the facilitator by providing introductions to community leaders, business owners and other useful contacts. The panel seek to address the specific needs or problems of each case, and where possible attempt to provide useful local clients and advice which may benefit the client. The Enterprise Facilitator is not an expert but someone who is a good listener, supportive, well-networked, and able to evaluate the skills and needs of entrepreneurs. The community panel includes local business and civic leaders, economic

development practitioners, and private sector professionals. Both the Enterprise Facilitator and board members receive training from the Sirolli institute in the principles of Enterprise Facilitation® and the trinity of management.

The Sirolli method offers a more flexible, informal and arguably more user-friendly approach than more traditional business support. The BG Effect model is able to cater for clients outside of normal working hours when perhaps traditional service providers could not be accessed. Additionally, the Enterprise Facilitation® model places no time constraint on an Enterprise Facilitator's time or length of support available to each client, meaning that clients always have access to support as and when issues arise. The Sirolli method allows for increased engagement and proliferation, by being less intimidating and more in line with the mind-set and attitudes of many entrepreneurs. Moreover, current business support cannot deliver on its targets for business start-ups unless there are individuals coming forward with business ideas. The Enterprise Facilitation® model, through its encouragement of potential entrepreneurs and its building of a volunteer panel drawn from local businesses and members with links into the community, is clearly about a means of delivering this requirement for growing the 'enterprise culture'.

## 2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to provide an interim evaluation of the Blaenau Gwent Effect programme, focusing on its current strength and weaknesses, as well as exploring potential future opportunities and threats. This aim is to be achieved by collecting qualitative data, via interview, from both members of the BG Effect team and clients who have experienced the BG Effect process.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is to provide an informal, people-orientated enterprise development function. The facilitator achieves this by assisting potential entrepreneurs in identifying their needs and establishing a network of local contacts, whom may already be known to the client but perhaps the client had not realised the potential support from those around them, who may be able to assist the client with certain aspects of their business; be that production, advertising, distribution or any business function. The facilitator also acts as a friendly mentor who is able to identify with the client and understand their goals and ambitions, and help the client understand how best to reach those goals. One of the objectives of this evaluation was to discover whether the clients felt that the role of the facilitator was beneficial to them. It was expected that there would be some mixed reactions, as different people have different preferences, and it was assumed that this type of provision would not suit everyone. Whilst it may still be correct that this model of

Enterprise Facilitation® would not suit everyone; the results of the research have been universally positive.

## Summary

- ✓ The role of the facilitator is working well and is valued by local entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Moe exemplifies the role of the facilitator.
- ✓ The informal nature of the support is valued by local entrepreneurs, and encourages more people to engage with BG Effect process.
- ✓ Moe's local contacts are not only helping his individual clients, but also building small networks of local businesses who are working together.
- ✓ Awareness of the BG Effect is being increased by word of mouth, as past clients have no hesitation in recommending the process to peers.
- ✓ More local people are being encouraged to think entrepreneurially
- ✓ Facilitator's role improved by not having strict targets that must be met, allowing for honest and impartial advice to be given.
- ✓ The lack of rigid structure allows the Facilitator to view, and deal with, every case on its individual merits, and isn't forced to following set criteria which may not be suitable to every client.
- The workload of the facilitator has become too large, and some clients feel that this has limited the amount of contact they are able to have with Moe. There are clear opportunities for either a second facilitator or administrative support for the existing facilitator.

### 3.2 The Role of the Volunteer Panel

The Volunteer Panel, or simply The Panel, is the second major resource adopted by the Sirolli method, and is a major component of the Sirolli method's success. Enterprise Facilitation® is an equal partnership between the Facilitator and the Panel, with the latter being a key factor in the success of any programme. The Panel is comprised of a group of volunteers drawn from the local community, who come together to establish a credible, reliable and trusted community resource. The Panel usually meets once per month or as and when the Enterprise Facilitator identifies a need, and is made up of individuals from a range of different backgrounds and interests. The role of the panel is to make introductions for the facilitator, to both boost his contacts and increase the profile of the Blaenau Gwent Effect. The theory is that by increasing the profile of the BG Effect and its services, more people in the community will be motivated to seek the advice of the facilitator. Also, once the facilitator has met with a client and established what support they require, he is able to approach the panel to collectively discuss the case and generate ideas, leads and contacts in order to help the entrepreneur.

Establishing an effective working panel is another key component determining the success of the Sirolli approach. Consequentially this evaluation must consider the operational effectiveness of the BG Effect's volunteer panel. Of key important to the success of the management board is the continuing recruitment of enthusiastic and committed members with from a diverse range of backgrounds.

#### Summary

- ✓ The panel has an impressive membership of 58, giving it the potential to be very effective.
- ✓ The panel is committed to increasing its scale in terms of numbers and increasing its skills base and the diversity of expertise offered by members.
- ✓ The panel is well informed, and hold monthly meetings with the facilitator.
- ✓ The panel is committed to monitoring its progress.
- ✓ The panel has strived to achieve representation from all key sectors.
- There is perhaps an over representation of the public and third sectors at the expense of the private sector. (A problem intrinsic to the Welsh economy)
- There appears to be some work required to fully engage panel members as evidenced by the average attendance figures. However, there are mechanisms in place to ensure that clients can access the support they require.

### 3.3 The Role of the Management Board

The Management Board has the overall responsibility for running the BG Effect project, securing funding and overseeing the projects delivery. The Board has 12 members with a wide range of skills and a strong team culture. The facilitator is directly accountable to the Board and its members and also meets with them monthly, which is considered good working practice as it ensures that everyone is continually kept informed of the projects aims, objectives and results. However, going beyond this the facilitator is in daily contact with Mark Langshaw, Chair of the Board. This is excellent working practice as it allows the Board and the facilitator to work efficiently together and ensures the smooth running of the BG Effect. This also evidences the Board's commitment to being actively involved in running the BG Effect and ensuring it success. This is backed up by the results of our key person interviews which has highlighted that the Board are very much in control with a core of committed individuals. Also demonstrative of the commitment of the Board is the retention of the original Board Members, thus far only one Board Members has resigned, and this is due to work commitments in their primary role.

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- ✓ Strong team culture with good retention of original Board Members.
- ✓ Follows good working practice of being in constant contact with the facilitator to ensure the informed delivery of BG Effect services.

- ✓ There has been praise of the strong Leadership provided by Mark Langshaw, and the Board's commitment to running the BG Effect with a strong private sector approach.
- ✓ The Management Board should also be commended for their willingness to let the facilitator carry out his role without much emphasis on meeting set targets.
- ✓ The Board have ensured that the procedures are in place to track their outputs and outcomes.
- There is perhaps an over representation of the public and third sectors at the expense of the private sector, with the "same old faces" being involved in the project.

### 3.4 Outcomes

The standard task of an evaluation is to assess the outputs and outcomes of a particular project, and compare these to its baseline figures, set objectives or to a similar project from elsewhere. However with this project this formula seems inappropriate. There is little up front success with Enterprise Facilitation®, the process of embedding the facilitator into the community and growing confidence takes time, and it is only in years 3 – 5 that results will begin to become impressive. The lengthy lead-in processes and the long term nature of the project's outcomes make a detailed observation of outcomes to date inappropriate and largely unrepresentative of the organisation success or failure. What is important to establish at this stage is whether or not the BG Effect is committed to bringing about positive change in the area, and whether it has the correct monitoring and evaluation procedures in place to assess its impact in the future.

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- ✓ The BG Effect team has displayed an impressive commitment to monitoring and evaluating their progress thus far. There has been a serious organisational buy-in to the cause of monitoring and evaluation, and not a superficial "tick box" form of monitoring.
- ✓ The BG Effect team are committed to understanding their impact.
- ✓ The team periodically produce a Management Report to both track their progress as they go along, and make sure everyone is one to speed with how the project is maturing. This also ensures that performance is improving delivery, and visa-versa.
- ✓ Although it is too early to place much emphasis on results and targets, the initial results are very positive and suggest that the Enterprise Facilitation® process is being well received in the area.
- ✓ The project is committed to achieving its objectives, but has thus far managed to avoid getting bogged down by targets.

### 3.5 BG Effect and the Sirolli Process

One of the issues that need to be explored as part of this evaluation is how the Sirolli principles fit into the Blaenau Gwent context, and whether or not there are any aspects of the delivery that may need to be adapted to the Blaenau Gwent context. Within this, it is important to establish whether the BG Effect team are consciously attempting to fit the Enterprise Facilitation® model around their unique context and circumstances. Whilst conducting the research to inform this evaluation it became evident that the BG Effect has been well received, and provides a crucial service in the area; but also that the BG Effect team have begun to adapt the process to best suit their aims, objectives and circumstances.

#### Summary

- ✓ The BG Effect team have begun to adapt the Sirolli process to best suit their aims, objectives and context, which is pleasing. One of the core principles of any localised intervention is that you must listen, and adapt your working practices to the needs and wants of the population that you are serving, and the BG Effect team have taken this on board.
- ✓ The adoption of office space for the facilitator has improved his working practices.
- ✓ The introduction of a small website and small scale advertising has helped to spread awareness of the BG Effect without overtly advertising it.
- The online presence of the BG Effect needs improving.
- There appear to be unexplored opportunities in networking space or events throughout the Blaenau Gwent area.

### 3.6 The Sirolli Institute and Value for Money

Another question which needs to be addressed is whether the involvement of the Sirolli Institute was required to run an Enterprise Facilitation® type programme; the involvement of the Institute representing a significant cost in its delivery. The Sirolli fees entitle BG Effect to access support and training from the Sirolli institute. At this stage of an Enterprise Facilitation® project it is not possible to assess the project in terms of its value for money, as its effectiveness won't be fully observable until a few years into the project. However, it is interesting to discover whether the members of the BG Effect team feel that the services of the Sirolli institute have constituted value for money.

#### Summary

- ✓ The involvement of the Sirolli institute has represented value for money for the BG Effect.
- ✓ The BG Effect team have gained significant knowledge, training and confidence from the involvement of the Sirolli Institute.
- ✓ Ernesto Sirolli is an inspiring, charismatic figurehead.

- ✓ Having the Sirolli branding has increased the profile of the BG Effect and generated interest in the project.

#### 4. Summary SWOT analysis

The current position of BG Effect is summarised in the SWOT analysis table, drawing out the key issues and presenting them as a series of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.



# Blaenau Gwent Effect Interim Evaluation

## 1 Introduction

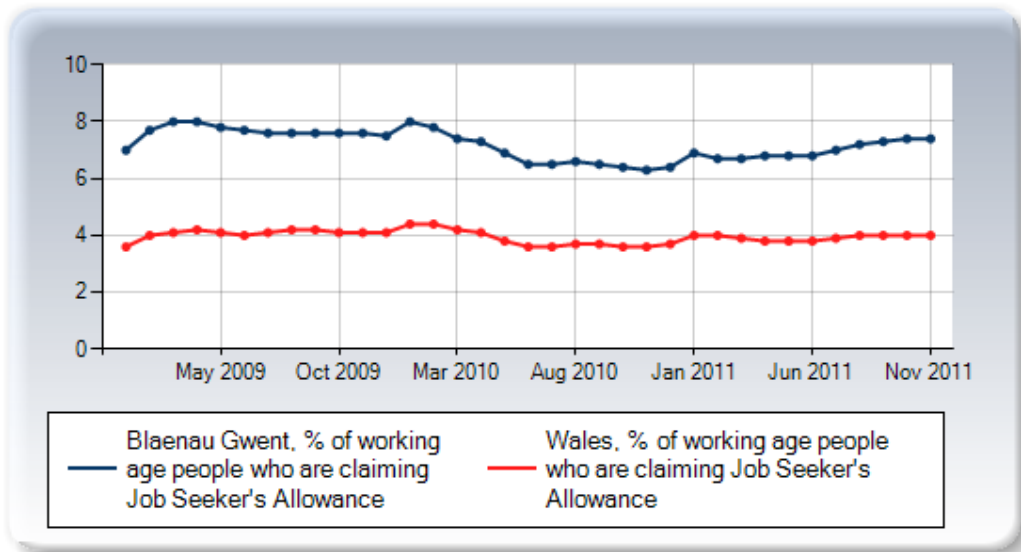
The Blaenau Gwent Regeneration Strategy (2009) was an ambitious document that outlined the current situation in the Blaenau Gwent area and proposed an exciting vision for the future. According to this strategy:

*“The closure of the Corus works at Ebbw Vale brought fundamental changes to the structure of the Blaenau Gwent economy. It took away a source of well-paid, secure employment and created massive challenges for the public authorities throughout South East Wales. However it also provided a major catalyst in forging exciting new public and private partnerships, devising ambitious and transformational regeneration strategies and accessing substantial WAG and EU funding to make the delivery of these strategies a reality... However, despite considerable activity and undoubted successes since 2002, Blaenau Gwent still suffers across a wide range of socio-economic factors.”* (BG Regeneration Strategy, p. 9)

Whilst it is not uncommon for significant regenerative changes to take well over a decade, it is clear that Blaenau Gwent still needs significant regenerative support if it is to become a thriving, self-sustaining region of the future. In particular Blaenau Gwent struggles in terms of financial poverty, low rates of economic activity and a high unemployment rate. According to the Regeneration Strategy:

*“Blaenau Gwent still suffers from acute and widespread levels of deprivation. According to the new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, 21% of the Borough’s small areas (LSOAs) are in the most deprived 10% in Wales. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest proportion in Wales, but has improved since 2005. Statistically the most deprived small areas are in Tredegar Central & West, Sirhowy and Ebbw Vale North, although deprivation is evident in many parts of the Borough.”*

Clearly, the Blaenau Gwent area faces serious economic hardship and deprivation. This conclusion is further supported by the latest Department for Work and Pensions data regarding the percentage of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), which clearly shows that the out of work benefit claimant rate of Blaenau Gwent is almost double that of the Welsh national average.



(Source: <http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/profiles/profile?profileId=22&geoTypeId=1>)

With an annual out-of-work benefits claimant rate of 24.2% in 2010, the rate is the highest in Wales. *‘There are also higher proportions of people claiming incapacity benefits, income support and pensions credit in Blaenau Gwent than the Welsh average.’* (BG Regeneration Strategy, P. 11). With an economic inactivity rate (excluding students) of 28.5% for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, again well above the Welsh average, it is clear that a new approach to creating jobs and employment is necessary in the area; and with only 4.9% of the population classified as being self-employed, compared to 8.1% for Wales as a whole, Enterprise Facilitation® would appear to provide a good fit with the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the Blaenau Gwent area. The BG Effect was established with these prevailing conditions in mind; Effect stands for Enterprise Facilitation for Effective Community Transformation.

### Background to BG Effect

Blaenau Gwent Effect was operationally established on March 14th 2011 to provide Enterprise Facilitation® services based on the principles of the Sirolli Institute. It was formed out of a partnership between Blaenau Gwent County Council, the Heads of the Valleys Programme and a consortium of Communities First partnerships. The overall aim of the project was to implement an Enterprise Facilitation® project throughout Blaenau Gwent and support the creation of new enterprises through a community-based initiative. Its mission statement is;

*“To work together as a partnership between the community, public, private and voluntary sectors to increase enterprise activity and secure sustainable economic regeneration for the benefit of the local community”.*

The BG Effect aims to create an enterprise culture within the local community and provide local people with an opportunity to consider self-employment as a career path. In doing so

BG Effect hopes to both maintain current job opportunities, and create new employment in the local area which will aid in its future economic sustainability, and bring about a positive regenerative change. This approach is intended to sit alongside, and complement, the traditional business and enterprise support services, such as Venture Wales.

### **Blaenau Gwent Effect and the Sirolli model**

The BG Effect was officially launched in March 2011, and from the outset it has adopted the principles of the Sirolli Institute, an economic Development group based in the USA, and led by international economic development specialist Dr Ernesto Sirolli. The underlying credo of the Sirolli principles is that:

*“the future of every community lies in capturing the talent, energy and imagination of its people hence we specialize in responsive approaches to Local Development that grow the community from within, transforming passionate people into successful entrepreneurs.”*  
(<http://www.sirolli.com/About/SirolliCredo/tabid/91/Default.aspx>)

Essentially, the idea is not unique. The Sirolli Institute promotes a people-centred, bottom-up and localised approach which stimulates people to become more enterprising and pursue entrepreneurship as a career path. Sirolli’s belief is that a successful business requires three main competencies: technical ability to produce a product or service, ability to market the product or service, and ability to manage the finances of the venture, and that few individual entrepreneurs have ever possessed all three competencies. This is known as the ‘Trinity of Management’®. Sirolli argues that successful entrepreneurs simply make up for their lack of a certain competency by finding a partner who possesses the skills which they lack. Consequently, the model aims to aid local entrepreneurs in becoming successful, by building teams of competence around them.

In practice, Enterprise Facilitation® consists of two main components; an Enterprise Facilitator and a community panel. The Enterprise Facilitator becomes the initial point of contact for business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, and helps them understand their business idea. The service is free, informal and confidential, and if the client requires any help or direction with their ideas, then the facilitator can take their case to the panel. The second element is a community panel, composed of anywhere between 20 to 60 local stakeholders, which support the facilitator by providing introductions to community leaders, business owners and other useful contacts. The panel seek to address the specific needs or problems of each case, and where possible attempt to provide useful local clients and advice which may benefit the client. The Enterprise Facilitator is not an expert but someone who is a good listener, supportive, well-networked, and able to evaluate the skills and needs of entrepreneurs. The community panel includes local business and civic leaders, economic development practitioners, and private sector professionals. Both the Enterprise Facilitator and board members receive training from the Sirolli institute in the principles of Enterprise Facilitation® and the trinity of management.

This approach, whilst not totally unique in its conception, differs quite significantly from the traditional business and enterprise services in the Blaenau Gwent area. Traditionally, business support has been provided by a specialist advisor, who meets with clients formally and seeks to share parts of his experience with the client. This process is usually governed by a set of rules or procedures and set stages which the client must complete in order to access support, and eventually reach the goal of establishing their company. The Sirolli method offers a more flexible, informal and arguably more user-friendly approach, which is able to cater for clients outside of normal working hours when perhaps traditional service providers could not be accessed. Additionally, the Enterprise Facilitation® model places no time constraint on an Enterprise Facilitator's time or length of support available to each client, meaning that clients always have access to support as and when issues arise. The Sirolli method allows for increased engagement and proliferation, by being less intimidating and more in line with the mind-set and attitudes of many entrepreneurs. Moreover, current business support cannot deliver on its targets for business start-ups unless there are individuals coming forward with business ideas. The Enterprise Facilitation® model, through its encouragement of potential entrepreneurs and its building of a resource panel drawn from local businesses and members with links into the community, is clearly about a means of delivering this requirement for growing the 'enterprise culture'. These features of the Sirolli model, combined with Ernesto's impressive reputation and previous successes appealed to key local stakeholders, and led to the BG Effect being formed using Sirolli principles.

## **2 Methodology**

The aim of this research is to provide an interim evaluation of the Blaenau Gwent Effect programme, focusing on its current strength and weaknesses, as well as exploring potential future opportunities and threats. This aim is to be achieved by collecting qualitative data, via interview, from both members of the BG Effect team and clients who have experienced the BG Effect process. The qualitative data will be compared with quantitative performance indicators which have been collected by the BG Effect team. The methodology implemented throughout this research project provides opportunities for in-depth, direct discussion with both key stakeholders and recipients of Enterprise Facilitation® services. By involving both parties in the consultation process we are able to develop a comprehensive picture of both the services available and the perceptions of current provision; as well as identifying key points which may help the future progress of the BG Effect. Also, by analysing these views alongside the information provided by the quantitative data, we will be able to develop a clear picture as to how the BG Effect has performed in its early stages.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is to provide an informal, people-orientated enterprise development function. The facilitator achieves this by assisting potential entrepreneurs in identifying their needs and establishing a network of local contacts, whom may already be known to the client but perhaps the client had not realised the potential support from those around them, who may be able to assist the client with certain aspects of their business; be that production, advertising, distribution or any business function. The facilitator also acts as a friendly mentor who is able to identify with the client and understand their goals and ambitions, and help the client understand how best to reach those goals. Not all business ideas are good business ideas, but the role of the facilitator is not to discourage entrepreneurs; instead the facilitator should help the client properly formulate his ideas and understand what is good about the idea, and what aspects of the idea may need to be improved, or suggest the introduction of a partner with a different skill set.

One of the objectives of this evaluation was to discover whether the clients felt that the role of the facilitator was beneficial to them. It is also worth pointing out that the process of embedding a facilitator in a community requires a long lead-in time, and as this evaluation is being carried out only 9 months after the project's inception, the facilitator is unlikely to be fully embedded in his community. It was expected that there would be some mixed reactions, as different people have different preferences, and it was assumed that this type of provision would not suit everyone. Whilst it may still be correct that this model of Enterprise Facilitation® would not suit everyone; the results of the research have been universally positive. Without exception, every respondent has commented that the Enterprise Facilitator is one of the stand-out successes of the BG Effect process, and that the role and function of the facilitator adds a real depth to the business support, or Enterprise Facilitation® process. Below are some of the responses received when clients have been asked whether having an Enterprise Facilitator has been beneficial to them:

*"Absolutely, 100 %. The business facilitator is fantastic, a really great idea."*

*"For myself the role is fantastic, it's just having that name and number to contact, it's just having someone to ring, because you can just get blinkered... but having someone to ring up ask what they think who can give an honest opinion and sort the wheat from the chaff is great. "*

*"Having that name and number to ring sometimes is worth a lot."*

What people seem to really value about the facilitator is his role in making introductions, introducing new contacts and knowing exactly where to turn for the right support and information:

*“If he doesn’t know someone who can help you..... actually, he always knows someone who can help you, which always gives you hope.”*

*“He was up here on Saturday because I’m looking at setting up a new venture, and by the time he left I had 5 new contacts locally who could help me with that.”*

Other particular features the clients felt the facilitator was able to help with included:

- Networking and generating new contacts in the local area
- Decreasing the costs of doing business\*
- Impartial and unbiased information, guidance and advice
- Assistance with distributing a product or service
- Marketing support
- Assistance with finding premises and work space
- Funding, loans and grants
- More general advice on what it takes to be an entrepreneur and run your own business

\*This was an interesting point raised on several occasions by clients involved in the consultation process. By providing local contacts, suppliers and distributors, not only does the local economy capture more of the benefits of the new business, but also the businesses make more profit as the travelling costs (time and money) between business services were reduced significantly. By encouraging local businesses to work together more often, the facilitator provides multifaceted benefits to their clients, other local businesses and the local economy. This is an interesting finding, which appears to lend increased support to the success of the BG Effect project.

One of the key factors which determine the success of the Sirolli model is the success of the facilitator. The results of this interim evaluation suggest that Moe Forouzan exemplifies this process. One of the main potential drawbacks of the Sirolli model is that a poor or uncommitted facilitator could stifle the entire process. However, in interviews with clients, panel members and Moe himself it has become clear that Moe’s passion and commitment make him perfectly suited to the role. The responses from two clients typify the feedback received regarding Moe:

*“The way he [Moe] works is fantastic. If you could find someone else who could do it like him then you wouldn’t go far wrong. He wants to help and he’s passionate about seeing businesses succeed. You really get the feeling that helping me makes his day, and he’s never happier than when something positive happens for my business. A few months ago I started*

*to think about giving it all up and getting another job, but it was Moe's personality and passion that saw me through, and I'm really glad that I stuck with it."*

*"It's rare to see someone doing his job enjoy it as much as Moe enjoys doing his. He seems extremely busy at the moment, receiving over 100 emails a day he tells me, but he still seems to love his job."*

Both Moe's personality and his approach combine to put clients at ease, which allows them to create an excellent working relationship and get to the heart of the matter affecting the client's business or idea. The informal nature of clients interactions with Moe appear to be very highly valued:

*"We've met formally, suited and booted, and informally and I think the informal approach is fantastic. It makes you feel easier and more comfortable and can chat about ideas. I've met Moe in Wetherspoons and just having a chat about the business and where it's going like that is fantastic. You'd be surprised at the great ideas we can come up with in a Wetherspoons."*

*"The informality is great. He's [Moe] always available, always return a call or sends an email, and it makes everything easier. It's never too late or too early to get in touch with Moe. We've got a good friendly rapport, I don't mind ringing him and if I need a favour I'll ask, if he needs a favour he can ask me."*

Another added advantage of this strong informal relationship is that the clients are able to identify with Moe on a more personal level; as such respondents have suggested that they value his advice more than they would from a bank or council employee. The relationship allows the clients to feel relaxed in the knowledge that Moe has their best interests at heart and is not guiding them as a result of certain targets he needs to meet. This allows for more open and frank debate, where the clients are more willing to take on board constructive criticism and suggestions. This should ultimately lead to the adoption of more successful business ideas, and practises.

Interestingly, although the BG Effect was not set up as an alternative to the traditional methods of business support, it appears that many clients view this to be the case, and prefer the services offered by the BG Effect. Many respondents have suggested that the traditional business support provision does not give them any confidence. The impression clients got in previous experience of the traditional services was that they were very generic, forcing everyone to go through a certain process which may not be applicable to them in order to 'tick the boxes' and meet targets. As Moe put it, '*there is no one size fits all approach*' when it comes to Enterprise Facilitation® and business support. By utilising the Sirolli methods, the BG Effect and Moe are able to tailor the help given to each and every

client based on their needs and circumstances. This has the effect of increasing business start-ups, improving local businesses and networks, and encouraging more people to think entrepreneurially because they have heard of the excellent, informal support on offer to people with a business idea. Every client who responded in our evaluation said that they would absolutely recommend the BG Effect to anyone who wanted to start their own business, or had a business idea.

Whilst the majority of feedback received from clients was overwhelmingly positive, it was important to attempt to identify possible opportunities for the BG Effect to improve the services provided by the facilitator. Whilst there was only one issue raised in regard to the facilitator, it is an issue that was raised on numerous occasions. Many clients are suggesting that the facilitator's workload is getting too big, and that it may be time to employ a second facilitator to ensure that the quality of his work does not suffer.

*“the only thing that I can say about improving it [BG Effect] would be for the programme to take on more facilitators. Moe has over 80 businesses to deal with now and he doesn't have the time in the day to help each one as much as you can see he wants to, because his workload is so large. The only way I could improve the programme is by adding extra facilitators to deal with the workload.”*

Moe acknowledges that the majority of his work is done outside of normal work hours. The consensus between the facilitator and the clients suggest that the successes of BG Effect combined with its ambitious geographical area are beginning to create too much work for just one facilitator. In order to avoid a decrease in the quality of the service provided by the facilitator, and ensure that the BG Effect is able to continue to cover the entire Blaenau Gwent area, the initial evidence suggests that the appointment of a new facilitator may be required. However, there are some potential risks with this. Part of the success of the project to date has been due to Moe's reputation. Clients are happy to refer friends to Moe as a result of their relationship with him, and the BG Effect have effectively publicised the project as “got an idea, call Moe”; which has worked well to date. Appointing another facilitator would require a re-think of this strategy. Also unless each facilitator was given their own geographical location, there would be the potential for confusion, duplication and a more disorganised service. In trying to find a solution to this problem, Moe has suggested that the workload is manageable for one person now that the initial phases have been established. Moe has suggested that what takes up a large majority of his time is administration, organisation and completing paperwork. The success of the BG Effect project largely rests on Moe's ability to be in the community meeting potential and engaged clients. To support this objective the BG Effect board should consider putting administrative support in place for Moe as this would be more cost-effective than employing a second facilitator, would not affect the current branding and would achieve the desired outcome of freeing up more of Moe's time to be in the community meeting potential clients.



## Summary

- ✓ The role of the facilitator is working well and is valued by local entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Moe exemplifies the role of the facilitator.
- ✓ The informal nature of the support is valued by local entrepreneurs, and encourages more people to engage with BG Effect process.
- ✓ Moe's local contacts are not only helping his individual clients, but also building small networks of local businesses who are working together.
- ✓ Awareness of the BG Effect is being increased by word of mouth, as past clients have no hesitation in recommending the process to peers.
- ✓ More local people are being encouraged to think entrepreneurially
- ✓ Facilitator's role improved by not having strict targets that must be met, allowing for honest and impartial advice to be given.
- ✓ The lack of rigid structure allows the Facilitator to view, and deal with, every case on its individual merits, and isn't forced to following set criteria which may not be suitable to every client.
- The workload of the facilitator has become too large, and some clients feel that this has limited the amount of contact they are able to have with Moe. There are clear opportunities for a second facilitator or administrative support for the existing facilitator.

### 3.2 The Role of the Volunteer Panel

The Volunteer Panel, or simply The Panel, is the second major resource adopted by the Sirolli method, and is a major component of the Sirolli method's success. Enterprise Facilitation® is an equal partnership between the Facilitator and the Panel, with the latter being a key factor in the success of any programme. The Panel is comprised of a group of volunteers drawn from the local community, who come together to establish a credible, reliable and trusted community resource. The Panel usually meets once per month or as and when the Enterprise Facilitator identifies a need, and is made up of individuals from a range of different backgrounds and interests, including local businesses, business support agencies, housing associations, development trusts, community activists and the civil service. The role of the panel is to make introductions for the facilitator, to both boost his contacts and increase the profile of the Blaenau Gwent Effect. The theory is that by increasing the profile of the BG Effect and its services, more people in the community will be motivated to seek the advice of the facilitator. Also, once the facilitator has met with a client and established what support they require, he is able to approach the panel to collectively discuss the case and generate ideas, leads and contacts in order to help the entrepreneur.

Establishing an effective working panel is another key component determining the success of the Sirolli approach. Consequentially this evaluation must consider the operational effectiveness of the BG Effect's volunteer panel. Of key important to the success of the management board is the continuing recruitment of enthusiastic and committed members with from a diverse range of backgrounds. The key indicators of this success are:

1. The number of people on the panel

Recent figures show that the panel currently has 58 registered members. It is assumed that a panel would need around 20 active members to be fully functional. To use another U.K based organisation utilising the Sirolli method as a bench mark, the Tynedale Enterprise Facilitation® project, reaction, reported having around 40 members in their interim evaluation in 2009<sup>1</sup>. Based on these figures, and remembering that the BG Effect is still in its infancy as an organisation; the number of registered members on the volunteer panel is impressive. Also, in conversation with members of the panel there does appear to be an organisational commitment to continually increasing the size of the volunteer panel, which can only serve to increase its effectiveness.

2. The number of panel meetings and their average attendance

The Panel makes use of its large membership by holding monthly meetings, in which the facilitator gives a verbal briefing on his current cases for the panel's consideration. This arrangement of monthly meetings is in-line with the standard practice of other organisations utilising the Sirolli principles. Demonstrating its commitment to good practice, and monitoring its progress the panel also keep detailed information on the attendance of every meeting. However, one of the current issues facing the volunteer panel is the average attendance at panel meetings. The figures show that the average attendance of panel meetings is currently only 46% of registered members. However, in an attempt to overcome this issue, if a client's need is not met by those attending the Volunteer Panel Meeting, the Chair or Enterprise Facilitator will contact other members of the panel who could not attend the meeting.

3. The make-up of the panel

As part of their records the BG Effect team also keep information regarding the organisation of company to which each member belongs. This data allows us to build up a picture of what the panel can offer as a resource. The make –up of the panel determines what skills and contacts it has available to it. Ideally a panel should

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<sup>1</sup> Blake Stevenson, (2009), Evaluation of the Tynedale Enterprise Project: Interim Report, P. 5

consist of members from as many organisations and business sectors as possible, therefore allowing any type of business idea brought forward by the facilitator to be properly supported. However the lack of synergies between client ideas and the skills of the panel does not preclude the panel's ability to support a project. However, there is an assumption to be made that a more diverse panel is a more effective panel. In fact, one of the only criticisms that could be levied on the board is that, much like the panel, there is strong public and third sector representation and a slightly weaker representation of the private sector. There is a tendency for the meetings to consist of the "same old faces", but this is largely due to the nature of the project, and its relative infancy. This issue will be discussed more in the following section. However it may be suggested that this is also indicative of the distribution of the working population in Wales as a whole, with a strong focus on public and voluntary sections.

### **Summary**

- ✓ The panel has an impressive membership of 58, giving it the potential to be very effective.
- ✓ The panel is committed to increasing its scale in terms of numbers and increasing its skills base and the diversity of expertise offered by members.
- ✓ The panel is well informed, and hold monthly meetings with the facilitator.
- ✓ The panel is committed to monitoring its progress.
- ✓ The panel has strived to achieve representation from all key sectors.
- There is perhaps an over representation of the public and third sectors at the expense of the private sector. (A problem intrinsic to the Welsh economy)
- There appears to be some work required to fully engage panel members as evidenced by the average attendance figures. However, there are mechanisms in place to ensure that clients can access the support they require.

### **3.3 The role of the management board**

The Management Board has the overall responsibility for running the BG Effect project, securing funding and overseeing the projects delivery. The Board has 12 members with a wide range of skills and a strong team culture. The facilitator is directly accountable to the Board and its members and also meets with them monthly. This is a good working practice as it ensures that everyone is continually kept informed of the projects aims, objectives and results. However, going beyond this the facilitator is in daily contact with Mark Langshaw, Chair of the Board. This is excellent working practice as it allows the Board and the facilitator to work efficiently together and ensures the smooth running of the BG Effect. This also evidences the Board's commitment to being actively involved in running the BG Effect and ensuring it success. This is backed up by the results of our key person interviews which has highlighted that the Board are very much in control with a core of committed

individuals. Also demonstrative of the commitment of the Board is the retention of the original Board Members, thus far only one Board Member has resigned, and this is due to work commitments in their primary role.

Both the Management Board and Mark Langshaw have been praised for adopting a strong private sector approach. This approach has been described as a refreshing approach that limits the negativities associated with bureaucracy. The facilitator, Moe Forouzan, commented on the approach of the Management Board, "*It just blasts through the barriers and gets on with it. It is a very solution focused approach.*"

Part of the success of the Sirolli approach is its rejection of the expected norms of traditional business support. By largely removing structured protocols and procedures from the day to day activities of the facilitator, the BG Effect Board are providing an enterprise catalyst function which is unique to the area. The Management Board should also be commended for their willingness to let the facilitator carry out his role without much emphasis on meeting set targets. The Board understands that the Enterprise Facilitation® procedure requires long lead-in processes before the results are visible, and the Management Board are happy to track the facilitator's progress via their oral briefings at this stage. This process allows the facilitator more time to concentrate on his primary role, without having to record exactly what targets he is currently working towards.

One of the only criticisms that could be levied at the Board is that, much like the panel, there is strong public and third sector representation and a slightly weaker representation of the private sector. Whilst there is an opportunity to broaden the membership in the future to include more individuals from the private sector, it is again noted that the overrepresentation of public and third sector organisations is indicative of the entire Welsh economy.

It has also been alluded to that the Board comprises largely of the 'familiar faces' of the business support sector. However, these criticisms should be tempered at this stage. The BG Effect has run for less than a year, and it is notoriously difficult to engage private sector representatives in a venture such as this without first proving its effectiveness. There has been a positive indication from numerous clients interviewed that were they to be successful, and the BG Effect programme continue to operate in the area, then they would like to be part of the panel and the Board in the future. This highlights the high esteem and good reputation which the organisation is developing, and suggests that it should attract more private sector support in the future. Also, the current Chair's commitment to running the BG Effect with a strong private sector approach should help to attract interest from other private sector organisations.

## Summary

- ✓ Strong team culture with good retention of original Board Members.
- ✓ Follows good working practice of being in constant contact with the facilitator to ensure the informed delivery of BG Effect services.
- ✓ There has been praise of the strong Leadership provided by Mark Langshaw, and the Board's commitment to running the BG Effect with a strong private sector approach.
- ✓ The Management Board should also be commended for their willingness to let the facilitator carry out his role without much emphasis on meeting set targets.
- ✓ The Board have ensured that the procedures are in place to track their outputs and outcomes.
- ✓ There is perhaps an over representation of the public and third sectors at the expense of the private sector, with the "same old faces" being involved in the project.

### 3.4 Outcomes

The standard task of an evaluation is to assess the outputs and outcomes of a particular project, and compare these to its baseline figures, set objectives or to a similar project from elsewhere. However with this project this formula seems inappropriate. There is little up front success with Enterprise Facilitation®, the process of embedding the facilitator into the community and growing confidence takes time, and it is only in years 3 – 5 that results will begin to become impressive. The lengthy lead-in processes and the long term nature of the project's outcomes make a detailed observation of outcomes to date inappropriate and largely unrepresentative of the organisation success or failure. What is important to establish at this stage is whether or not the BG Effect is committed to bringing about positive change in the area, and whether it has the correct monitoring and evaluation procedures in place to assess its impact in the future.

#### 1. Monitoring and Evaluation Practice

The BG Effect team has displayed an impressive commitment to monitoring and evaluating their progress thus far. Every action of the Volunteer Panel and the Enterprise Facilitator are logged in order to carry out continued longitudinal evaluation. There has also been a commitment by the BG Effect team to capture Baseline data from the beginning of the project in order for a full evaluation to highlight both what the outputs of the BG Effect project have been, but also what the outcomes have been for those involved and for the local area as a whole. This represents very good practice. On top of this data collection the BG Effect team also records the minutes of all of the major meetings held between the Panel, Facilitator and the Board and also periodically produces a Management Report to both track their progress as they go along, and make sure everyone is up to speed with how the project is maturing.

## 2. Targets, Objectives and Organisational Buy-in

One of the key problems with monitoring and evaluation approaches based solely on targets which has arisen over the past decade has been “tick-box” monitoring and evaluation. This is usually as a result of targets being imposed on an organisation by their funders, without much organisational buy-in to the procedures. This often leads to ineffective monitoring, which although may tick boxes for funding requirements, can actually be very superficial and produce evaluations which in reality tell us very little about the impact and effectiveness of a certain project. With the BG Effect this doesn't appear to be the case. The abundance of useful data collected, and the way in which progress is being tracked highlights that there has been a serious organisational buy-in to the cause of monitoring and evaluation. The BG Effect team are committed to establishing exactly what their outcomes and outputs have been and what benefit they have brought about in the area and how the project may be improved. The BG Effect team have developed a set of targets with the Sirolli institute which forms the basis of their evaluation and their objectives. One of the threats to the future success of the Sirolli institute would be that a long-term funder such as the Welsh Government or local authority may try to impose targets and objectives that are seen in the more traditional business support institutions and which do not reflect the more informal Sirolli approach.

## 3. Performance to date

Given the relative infancy of the BG Effect initiative, and the nature of Enterprise Facilitation®, it is important not to place too much emphasis on the current results. With that said, as the results tables (see below) show the early results of the BG Effect team have been very impressive. At the beginning of its 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, the BG Effect team are already exceeding, meeting or close to their targets. In fact only one indicator appears to be well under target, however this indicator concerns the ‘Number of clients (aside from those starting a business) that are retained in continuous employment or training for 28 weeks (from partner activities)’. This is understandable given that the BG Effect team have only been fully operational for 10 months, and are only now beginning to become fully imbedded in the community.

# Current Project Status

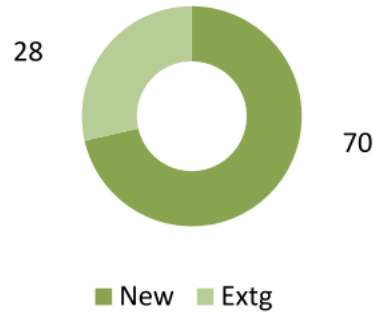
March – December 2011



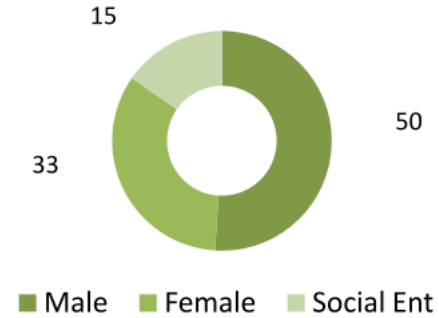
## Introductions - 634



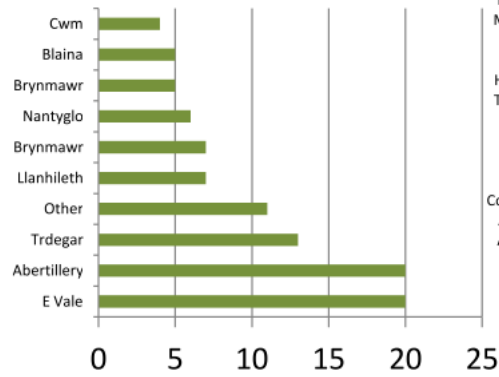
## Clients - 98



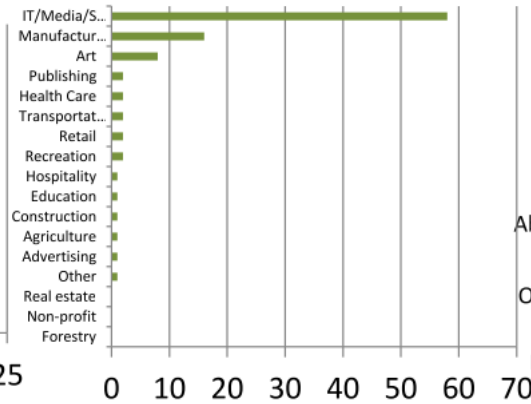
## Clients Demographic



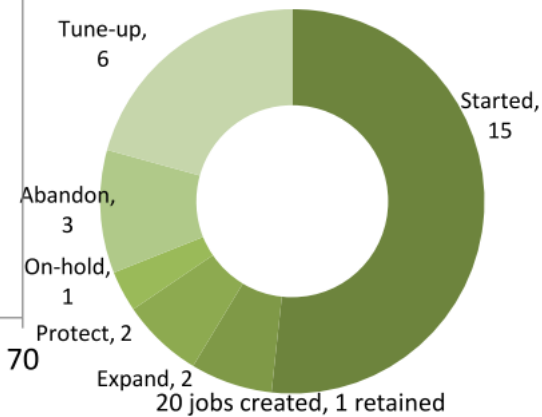
## Clients by Area



## Business Profile



## Outcomes - 29 to date



Project Objective			Target	2011 Mar-May	2011 Jun-Aug	2011 Sep-Nov	2011/2 Dec-Feb	2012 Mar-May	2012 Jun-Aug	Target
1	To help the community create its own businesses and jobs	1a	Number of businesses started (including self-employed)	0	2	9	15			20
		1b	Number of jobs created (employed) by project businesses	0	2	13	20			20
2	Establish a cross-CF partnership project and resource board to act as the hub for the community network that will develop new entrepreneurial activity	2a	Number of clients introduced	355	521	602	634			1800
		2b	Number of clients engaged (based on 10% of introductions)	43	60	96	98			180
3	Train local partners, CF partnership members and community representatives to become active members of that network and to maximise their links to other resources available to new businesses/clients	3a	Number of referrals generated by project	29	42	91	98			60
		3b	Total referrals received by partners (training providers/Jobcentre+/FS4B etc)	Report from Jun onwards	84	105	113			40
4	Create a system of engagement and referral that is coherent and measurable to allow for effective external evaluation and replication	4	Number of clients (aside from those starting a business) that are retained in continuous employment or training for 28 weeks (from partner activities)	0	1	4	4			60



Project Objective		KPI for 2011/2	2011 Mar-May	2011 Jun-Aug	2011 Sep-Nov	2011/2 Dec-Feb	Target	
A	To create and support a culture of entrepreneurship and help the community to create and support its own business and jobs	1	Number of people self-employed	0	2	13	20	40
		2	1 Enterprise Facilitator trained in principles of Sirolli	Trained in March	Trained in March	Trained in March	Trained in March	OK/NOK
		3	Appointments to the Management Board	14	13	13	14	12
		4	Introductions made by Management Board/Facilitator/Total	255	389/132 521	422/180 602	444/190 634	100
		5	Number of people trained in principles of Sirolli	12 Mngt 17 Vol Pnl	12 Mngt 17 Vol Pnl	13 Mngt 17 Vol Pnl	14 Mngt 17 Vol Pnl	13
		6	Number of people on Volunteer Panel	21	46	52	52	18
		7	Number of trained and active volunteers	32	32	50	50	30
		8	Introductions made by Volunteer Panel members	0 - training only in May	0	4	6	180
		9	Minimum of 2 businesses to be discussed at each Volunteer Panel Mtg	0 - training only in May	2	2	3	2
B	Management Board to act as the hub for the community network that will develop and facilitate client introductions to the Enterprise Facilitator	10	Introductions made by Volunteer Panel members	0 - training only in May	0	4	6	180
C	Create an effective referral and communication system for the benefit of clients & partners	11	Referrals made to partner support services	29	42	91	98	40
D	To assist local SME's expand and maintain their businesses, the EF will provide a comprehensive bespoke support package including referrals and signposting to partner agencies and services	12	Number of SME's being supported	16	16	27	28	10

At this stage of the Blaenau Gwent Effect project, there appears to be good quality of engagement with clients, good communication between the facilitator and clients and between the facilitator, the Panel and the Board. The team appears to already be reaching, or nearing, a great deal of its targets, which is impressive given its early stage. Finally, and more importantly, the BG Effect team are clearly committed to both monitoring and evaluating its impacts, and understanding impacts relative to both its targets and the opinions of the clients it serves.

### **Summary**

- ✓ The BG Effect team has displayed an impressive commitment to monitoring and evaluating their progress thus far. There has been a serious organisational buy-in to the cause of monitoring and evaluation, and not a superficial “tick box” form of monitoring.
- ✓ The BG Effect team are committed to understanding their impact.
- ✓ The team periodically produce a Management Report to both track their progress as they go along, and make sure everyone is one to speed with how the project is maturing. This also ensures that performance is improving delivery, and visa-versa.
- ✓ Although it is too early to place much emphasis on results and targets, the initial results are very positive and suggest that the Enterprise Facilitation® process is being well received in the area.
- ✓ The project is committed to achieving its objectives, but has thus far managed to avoid getting bogged down by targets.

### **3.5 BG Effect and the Sirolli Process**

One of the issues that need to be explored as part of this evaluation is how the Sirolli principles fit into the Blaenau Gwent context, and whether or not there are any aspects of the delivery that may need to be adapted to the Blaenau Gwent context. Within this, it is important to establish whether the BG Effect team are consciously attempting to fit the Enterprise Facilitation® model around their unique context and circumstances. Whilst conducting the research to inform this evaluation it became evident that the BG Effect has been well received, and provides a crucial service in the area; but also that the BG Effect team have begun to adapt the process to best suit their aims, objectives and circumstances.

For example, one of the key Sirolli ideas is that the facilitator should not have an office but should work proactively in the community. However, Moe has found it difficult to ‘*work out of the back of his car*’ and felt he needed an office base not to meet clients but to get basic support systems in place. This perspective was shared in a later interview with Mark Langshaw, and highlights that the team are thinking progressively and committed to making the model suit their context. Given the high esteem in which the Sirolli model is often held, it would be easy to stick rigidly to the original model on the assumption that it is the best way to operate. However, one of the core principles of any localised intervention is

that you must listen, and adapt your working practices to the needs and wants of the population that you are serving.

Another example would be the BG Effect website. Under the principles of the Sirolli method, awareness of the BG Effect should be spread via word of mouth throughout the community, and there should be no marketing or public relations. Whilst the word of mouth approach is strongly backed by both the facilitators and members of the board, there has been recognition within the organisation that a small website, and some marketing could be used to initially promote the organisation and spread awareness. The website is a practical addition to the BG Effect team, as it has emphasised the “got an idea, call Moe” approach, and allows people to find out how to get in touch with the facilitator. Whilst the website is a step in the right direction, it would seem illogical in contemporary Britain not to have some form of internet presence; some respondents have suggested that the website is still too limited. This may be due to the fact that the BG Effect team have tried not to stray too far away from the core Sirolli ideas, which is understandable. However, as the BG Effect have already taken the steps to create a website, it may be worth adding a few extra pages to shed a little background onto what the BG Effect is, why it was set up and what it can offer budding entrepreneurs. At the moment the website appears to be a holding page, not a fully functional website, which may be off-putting to some potential clients. A more professional website would help bring the projects online image more in line with its good representation in the area.

Another issue which has been identified by some clients is the lack of networking opportunities, or enterprise centres in the Blaenau Gwent area. A number of respondents have suggested that what people in the Blaenau Gwent area are particularly poor at is networking and making contacts, and this is not helped by a lack of networking events, locations and opportunities. One client stated:

*“For me it’s all about networking. You put me in a room with 30 other entrepreneurs and I’ll leave there with at least 5 or 6 contacts that I’ll use, or some leads for new business, ideas or clients. And for me that’s something that we’re bad at in South Wales, and particularly the Valleys. It’s an issue that no one is really tackling, and it’s something that I think the BG Effect would be in a good position to organise.”*

Whilst it is not suggested that the BG Effect provide an enterprise centre or a physical location for meetings, business activity and networking; there may be an opportunity for the BG Effect to facilitate bi-annual networking events to allow local entrepreneurs and business owners the opportunity to network and exchange views and ideas. This would fill a void in the Blaenau Gwent area, and allow its clients to make more local contacts who may be able to help, support or collaborate with them.

## Summary

- ✓ The BG Effect team have begun to adapt the Sirolli process to best suit their aims, objectives and context, which is pleasing. One of the core principles of any localised intervention is that you must listen, and adapt your working practices to the needs and wants of the population that you are serving, and the BG Effect team have taken this on board.
- ✓ The adoption of office space for the facilitator has improved his working practices.
- ✓ The introduction of a small website and small scale advertising has helped to spread awareness of the BG Effect without overtly advertising it.
- The online presence of the BG Effect needs improving.
- There appear to be unexplored opportunities in networking space or events throughout the Blaenau Gwent area.

### 3.6 The Sirolli Institute and Value for Money

Another question which needs to be addressed is whether the involvement of the Sirolli Institute was required to run an Enterprise Facilitation® type programme; the involvement of the Institute representing a significant cost in its delivery. The Sirolli fees entitle BG Effect to access support and training from the Sirolli institute. At this stage of an Enterprise Facilitation® project it is not possible to assess the project in terms of its value for money, as its effectiveness won't be fully observable until a few years into the project. However, it is interesting to discover whether the members of the BG Effect team feel that the services of the Sirolli institute have constituted value for money.

The Facilitator felt that the Sirolli method has proven to be cost effective as a model and gave a framework and clear mechanisms for implementation from the very start. It also gave the team a confidence in the project as Ernesto can prove its success with global examples. The Sirolli inspiration from Ernesto was important and continued support ensures that you have access to someone who can answer any questions as they arise. Mark Langshaw acknowledges that the initial fee is expensive but felt it was worth it. He explained that, in the context of other business support models it was actually cost effective, and actually provides an opportunity for potential income generation in the future by advising others to set up Sirolli projects. All respondents have expressed a belief that the Sirolli Enterprise Facilitation® model offers a more effective way of spending mainstream budgets with stronger outcomes. Also, in terms of inspiring sufficient people to become involved with the project, the involvement of Ernesto Sirolli in addressing community meetings and generally motivating people has proved excellent value for money.

The respondents were also asked about the training they had received from the Sirolli institute. There was a consensus that whilst the concepts were not inherently difficult to understand, the training had pulled together different strands of

information to create a clear unified approach. The training also appears to have bonded the team who were all from different backgrounds. The team went on an intensive 5 day programme delivered by Ernesto Sirolli and Linda McCowan in which they were taught the fundamentals of the Trinity of Management method. They were taught to identify strengths and weakness and used Blaenau Gwent case studies to learn by doing. The respondents have suggested that it was very useful to tap the 35 years of experience from Ernesto, and that the training had prompted a good identification of forward issues. Although there were suggestions that the training was quite long and repetitive, and that there should have been specialist facilitator training, in all the respondents had found the training a positive experience. Again, the respondents have been fairly consistent in their views that the Sirolli training has been very useful to them, and does constitute good value for money.

The evidence suggests that the Sirolli Institutes involvement in the project has provided value for money. Clearly, whilst the principles that underpin the Sirolli philosophy are not all that complex, and the notion of grass-roots business support isn't unique, the involvement of the Sirolli Institute has greatly benefitted the development of the BG Effect project. Although the initial fees can seem expensive, the support, training and expertise provided by the Sirolli institute have raised the profile of the project, increased the confidence of those involved and most importantly provided a tried and tested method of Enterprise Facilitation® that has proven global result. Although it would have been possible to set up a similar project without the up-front fees, it is unlikely that the project would have been as impressive as the current BG Effect.

### **Summary**

- ✓ The involvement of the Sirolli institute has represented value for money for the BG Effect.
- ✓ The BG Effect team have gained significant knowledge, training and confidence from the involvement of the Sirolli Institute.
- ✓ Ernesto Sirolli is an inspiring, charismatic figurehead.
- ✓ Having the Sirolli branding has increased the profile of the BG Effect and generated interest in the project.

#### **4. Summary SWOT analysis**

The current position of BG Effect is summarised in the table below, drawing out the key issues and presenting them as a series of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The main features are:

## Summary SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Central role of facilitator (Moe) – personality, approach, empathy – Mo exemplifies the process.</li><li>• Strong leadership of Mark Langshaw.</li><li>• Strong Management and volunteer panel offering excellent support.</li><li>• Large number of members of panel – (Problem – irregular attendance patterns).</li><li>• Good monitoring of achievements and meetings etc.</li><li>• Not bogged down by performance outputs and targets – but still committed to monitoring its effectiveness.</li><li>• Committed to adapting the core Sirolli principles to fit the Blaenau Gwent context.</li><li>• Good word of mouth dissemination of the project, and small scale advertising in local newsletters.</li><li>• Sirolli Institute on hand to give knowledge and advice.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decreased support and accessibility per client due to increased workload of facilitator – is one facilitator enough?</li><li>• Lack of networking events and opportunities beyond interaction with facilitator.</li><li>• Online presence is poor with little information available.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extra facilitator or administrative support for facilitator.</li><li>• Networking space or networking events to allow clients and local entrepreneurs to meet and facilitate a cross fertilization of ideas.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long term-funding</li><li>• Potential confusion and disorganization of having more than one facilitator</li></ul>