

# Social Innovation Academy



## Case Study

### Introduction:

Founded in early 2013 by Glenn Liddall the Edinburgh based charity People Know How tackles inequality from the standpoint of Social Innovation, working to empower individuals and organisations to unlock their ideas and fulfil their potential. Over the past year the organisation has grown rapidly, working with a wide range of groups and individuals; from young people starting secondary school to the City of Edinburgh Council. During 2015 - 2016 People Know How developed and piloted the Social Innovation Academy, a five month programme that matched 12 volunteers with four community organisations. These volunteers were trained to carry out community consultations, social research, and community development using a variety of materials from Open Learn. The programme was designed to be of benefit to everyone involved – participants who learn new skills and get to put them into practice; volunteers providing training and support; and community partners looking to respond to a social issue / challenge.

*“I am a supporter of People Know How and their work around social inclusion, and this is a great example of what I believe is important - citizenship for all in Edinburgh” - The Rt. Hon. Donald Wilson, Lord Provost of Edinburgh.*

***“We always talk about the Social Innovation Academy being the real centre point, the real focus of the organisation”*** stated Glenn Liddall, and People Know How look to learn from the pilot to develop the Academy further. This asset based approach is reflected in the organisations values, mission and aims. The Academy has been hailed as a great example of promoting citizenship in the City of Edinburgh by The Rt. Hon. Donald Wilson, Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

### The Social Innovation Academy and collaborative learning:

The Social Innovation Academy first ran from October 2015 until March 2016. The aim of the pilot was to provide people from a variety of backgrounds; training and hands on experience in community development, consultation and social research from a social innovation perspective. The four community partners were local charities that had identified social issues. Each organisation presented their issue to the participants and they in turn selected which project they would most like to work on, described by Glenn Liddall as a ***“reverse Dragons Den”***.

#### The community partners and projects were as follows:

1. **Cockburn Association:** engage Edinburgh citizens in considering the merits of the “green belt” and the need for affordable housing.
2. **Scottish Adoption Agency:** gather public attitudes towards adoption in Scotland whilst considering that there are 3 children seeking every adoptive parent.

3. **The Broomhouse Centre:** consult the local community on their needs and how they would like to see them addressed through the building of a new community centre.
4. **The Living Memory Association (THELMA):** analyse the current organisational strengths and opportunities and recommend a sustainable development strategy.

The pilot programme ensured that participants learnt and gained experience in tandem. The 12 participants were split into four teams and encouraged to communicate directly with the organisation they were working with, spending one day a week working on the project in the early stages. People Know How offered two full days training each week and discussions while participants simultaneously worked with their community partners. This allowed participants to

*“This experience had emphasised for me the joy, the adventure and the surprise of truly collaborative learning in a supportive environment – where learning can be directed to addressing real life issues” – Participant, The Social Innovation Academy Pilot*

share how their project was developing and turn to the full team to help resolve any issues they were facing. As the programme progressed and participants grew in confidence and skills, the portion of training versus project work reversed. Fluidity and adaptability within the learning environment were clearly central to success of the Academy.

The way the Open Learn materials were used promoted communication and collaborative group learning; people were not “sent” online to learn in isolation; instead the online materials were brought into physical space and participants were encouraged to share, discuss and learn from one another. Initial introductions focused on how people learn and how they can learn differently. This allowed for teams to be built based on individuals strengths. Glenn Liddall stated that

volunteers **“weren’t just working on their project, they had an eye on other peoples’ projects too, feeling encouraged and supported to share ideas – being collaborative not competitive”**. Participants and volunteers felt that this approach created a sense of family; people grew, learned and developed ideas together. One participant stated that **“making connections with the other participants and learning from their experiences has made me feel at home”**. It is this appreciation of the skills and knowledge of others that makes the approach to learning within the Social Innovation Academy unique, fundamentally, it promotes openness and adventure within a learning environment, empowering volunteers to share their knowledge and appreciate fellow learners.

## The benefits of The Social Innovation Academy:

This asset based approach has proved very fruitful, the benefits of the Academy were threefold, benefiting community partners, participants and volunteers. The impact the Academy has had on volunteers is directly measurable; prior to taking part in the Social Innovation Academy 9 out of 12 volunteers were not in education, employment or training. The organisation conducted follow up surveys with participants to fully understand the impact of the programme; finding out that, 8 out of the 9 participants who were not in education, employment or training have since taken on full or part time employment or education. Participants stated that the approach to learning and use of learning materials within the Social Innovation Academy had a significant impact on the way they approached various situations, for example, one participant stated that they used an approach they learned during the Academy in a successful job interview. One participant from the programme currently works with People Know How, another is now completing a PhD and several have reported an increase in confidence when placed in professional situations.

*“The success of the pilot is huge; it’s had a massive impact on our organisation. The Social Innovation Academy is the foundation for all that we do - going forward” – Glenn Liddall, Head and Founder, People Know How*

Benefits for community partners were also measureable, with them all stating that the Academy allowed them to find answers through research they would not have had the resources to conduct. The Scottish Adoption Agency has taken this further and is using the focus group design as part of their training for adoptive parents and is looking to collaborate with People Know How on another project. The Cockburn Association and The Living Memory Association (THELMA) are currently working closely with People Know How on a variety of different projects. The Broomhouse Centre has been involved with People Know How’s digital project – Re:Connect and the Academy has allowed People Know How to develop it as the cornerstone of the organisation and to apply the principles of the open learning environment to other projects. The success of collaborative learning and the creation of a “family” of volunteers is at the heart of what makes People Know How unique, and central to the success of the pilot. The way People Know How used Open Learn materials, approached collaborative learning and fostered a positive team environment has benefited not only participants, volunteers and community partners, but the organisation and the wider community.

## Looking to the future:

As People Know How develops, the success of the pilot programme has a clear influence with regard to the way projects are created and delivered, however, it is important that the essence of what made the pilot so successful is not lost as the programme expands. Glenn Liddall stated that the success of the pilot is founded upon the sense of purpose and direction it gave participants and the time spent building and supporting the teams. Plans are in place for future Academies with the team engaging people who have spent time out of education or have become disenchanted with learning. They will aim to reignite a spark of interest for people by building on collaborative learning and developing new approaches.

Providing a supportive learning environment was central to the first Academy and this is being further developed with a team of volunteers now in place to provide additional support and direction, providing volunteers with mentors and tailored training. Participants from the previous academy have offered to return and act as mentors and share their experiences. Further Volunteer Trainers will deliver interactive workshops and collaborate with the team to ensure the ethos of the academy stands the test of expansion and scaling.

Overall, the Social Innovation Academy is truly unique in its approach to learning; People Know How have used Open Learn materials to build a supportive and original learning environment which has been of clear benefit to participants, volunteers, community partners and the organisation. As the Academy develops, it will reach out and adapt further to meet the needs of a wider participant base.

Finally, People Know How contacted participants 6 months after the end of the Academy and compiled the following:

*“It is that sense of being part of something, part of the group. It gives you a cause and a purpose and I think that’s what we have to keep creating, that environment, that passion [...] it’s not just about having a programme that fits into a nice course handbook, its far more, its three dimensional – it’s a real living, breathing thing”  
Glenn Liddall, Head and Founder, People Know How*

<b>Employment/Education prior to taking part in the Social Innovation Academy</b>	<b>Employment/Education at 6 month follow up session</b>
Unemployed	Works for People Know How. Entering into further study. Will contribute to future Social Innovation Academies.
Part time employment	Completing PhD at Cambridge University concerning gender representation in children's literature and new media platforms.
Unemployed	In part time employment and studying an English language course at Edinburgh College. Continues to volunteer for People Know How.
Unemployed	Full-time employment within the third sector.
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Student	Returned to home country upon completion of degree.
Part-time employment	Now coordinating the next stage of the Social Innovation Academy.
Unemployed	In part time employment and studying to become a Steiner teacher.
Unemployed	Completing an internship in London.
Unemployed	Travelling the world.
Unemployed	Setting up their own photography business. Has had numerous commissions.
Unemployed	Completing MSc.

We believe that  
**people know how**  
to **identify** their needs  
and the **solutions** that  
will help them **realise**  
**their potential** and  
**solve social issues.**

We help by **supporting**  
and **empowering** people  
to get **organised** and make  
the best of their **strengths**  
and **resources.**

We call this process  
**social innovation.**

**“Unlocking ideas  
for a better future,  
today”**

Glenn Liddall  
Founder, **People Know How**



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