



Case Study: Down's Syndrome Manchester

Down's Syndrome Manchester is a charity that has supported individuals with Down's Syndrome and their families for over 20 years. Based across Greater Manchester, the organisation provides vital advocacy support and activities for its members across the region.

In July 2024, DSM sought to diversify their income stream and increase their network connections within Stockport.

While the organisation already had a solid reputation and track record, the team recognised the need to adapt to a changing funding landscape and build new partnerships that would support future growth and visibility within Stockport. The organisation specifically needed support to identify new funding opportunities and strengthen its skills at bid writing.

DSM approached Sector 3 with the goal of accessing training, personalised bid-writing support and stronger local networking opportunities.

E26 Thematic Areas:

The team participated in targeted bid-writing training and 'Meet the Funder' workshops, both of which strengthened their approach to funding applications, simultaneously building confidence in engaging with local funders.

DSM also received one-to-one support sessions with Sector 3's development team, which aimed to apply learning from the training to real funding opportunities. As a result, at the time of writing, DSM had secured £6,500 in funding, with an additional £4,500 bid pending.

Financial and Legal – training and tailored bid-writing support helped DSM improve its funding strategies and diversify income streams.

Contract Bidding and Marketing – through Meet the Funder events and funder engagement strategies, DSM was able to better to access competitive grant programmes.

Access to and Management of Physical Assets – Sector 3 also helped DSM secure a central Stockport co-working location, giving the organisation a more visible presence in the borough, improving access to Stockport specific networks and opportunities.

Demonstrating Social Impact – Conversations with funders and sector partners have also begun to support DSM in thinking about how best to represent and advocate for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) communities, contributing to stronger, more inclusive narratives in future applications.

Outcomes:

The organisation has secured new grant funding and is actively pursuing further bids with increased confidence. Its introduction to the R Time Network has opened up opportunities for collaboration around Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding, as well as broader representation of SEND communities in the local sector.

Most importantly, DSM has secured a co-working base in central Stockport, enhancing its reach and accessibility for members and partners in the borough, as well as improving opportunities to build on these budding, local connections.





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Insights and Lessons:

This case study shows that even established organisations can benefit from VCSE support, through the E26 programme, for example, through revisiting their funding strategies.

It also shows the importance of varied types of support, in this case, practical bid-writing training was successfully combined 1-2-1 support programmes, creating momentum and building confidence quickly.

Having a local presence is essential in building local relationships with funders and infrastructure networks, as well as members of the community that you aim to support.

Questions for other Social Enterprise organisations:

Are we making the most of local funders and networks in each of the boroughs our organisation operates in?

Do we have the internal skills to consistently and competitively apply for funding?

Could a physical presence expand our reach or improve visibility?

Reflections:

Some words from Esther Whitaker, CEO, Down's Syndrome Manchester: *"Sector 3 has opened doors for us that we never realised were closed. We are so grateful for the opportunity to build new connections, receive training and guidance. In only a short time the support we have received has been invaluable and we are so grateful to the team for changing our relationships with funders, helping us to secure valuable funding and creating spaces for wonderful opportunities such as the Forever Manchester awards. We look forward to continuing to work closely together for the benefit of our Down's Syndrome Manchester members."*

Link: <https://www.dsmanchester.org.uk/>

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