

ACH LAUNCHES NEW SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

If you are familiar with the work we do, you will be aware of our passion for **social enterprise**, our belief in **encouraging entrepreneurship** and our commitment to creating **meaningful employment opportunities** for marginalised members of the community. Whether you are new to ACH or have been following our work since we began, we hope this story of our journey into social enterprise will be of interest to you all.

When setting up ACH we were already well aware of the unmet aspirations for entrepreneurship within members of **BME** and newly arrived communities, and we recognise that traditional routes into employment can stifle these entrepreneurial ambitions and potential. Being a Housing Association for refugees, founded and led by refugees, we know full-well of the barriers that our tenants face in finding routes into employment.

Having developed over the years from a small charity into a viable business, we ourselves have experienced the benefits of operating as a social enterprise and we wish to now use this model for the benefits of our tenants and the wider communities in which we work.

We are excited to announce that thanks to the successful growth of ACH over recent years, we are in a position to launch a **NEW social enterprise**, based in **Birmingham**, which will offer training, employment and business opportunities to our tenants and members of the wider community.

Catering with a Conscience

Catering company Injera & Spice will give those who take part the opportunity to follow a traineeship programme designed to boost skills, increase confidence in the workplace and provide valuable work experience for people moving towards employment. Trainees will be able to improve upon vital interpersonal and workplace skills, as well as having the opportunity to gain skills specific to the catering industry. The traineeship is designed specifically with our target group in mind, namely refugees and members of BME communities who are unemployed and who face multiple barriers to gaining meaningful, long-term employment.

Amongst our tenants are talented chefs, business-minded social entrepreneurs, and people with can-do attitudes. Also amongst them are people whose lives have been uprooted by war and instability, thereby knocking them out of familiarity and into a place where much of life must start again. It goes without saying that many people not only have to overcome language and financial barriers when resettling in the UK, but must find the mental capabilities to continue living an

active life. Long-term unemployment can have an effect on one's confidence and capabilities in the workplace, so traineeships are an excellent way for people to rejoin employment.

A Catalyst for Change

One of the key ways in which a social enterprise environment is suitable for people rejoining employment is the diversity and personal interaction it allows people to immerse themselves in. Being locked out of the workplace affects social skills, and combined with a language barrier this can cause people to limit social interaction to within a small circle. Injera & Spice will give members of newly arrived communities the opportunity to work alongside people of different nationalities, genders, classes and ages and help people to integrate into UK life. In this way it will act as a vital bridge from unemployment into employment and further training.

Another primary aim of Injera & Spice is to allow tenants with an interest in business and social enterprise to gain insight and experience in this sector. This is part of our ongoing social enterprise strategy, which aims to support our tenants through enterprise opportunities and facilitate their start-up initiatives.

A Concept Whose Time Has Come

The idea of Housing Associations working with social enterprises is by no means a new one; housing associations were born out of a desire to meet social needs and many remain firmly committed to the social mission from which they were born. The Social Value Act in 2012 gave further reason for businesses and Housing Associations to work alongside social enterprises, as it provided financial incentive to do so.

Housing Associations commonly form their own social enterprises, offer capacity-building services to existing social enterprises, or support successful social enterprises through direct procurement. The 2014 Home Truths report by the National Housing Federation said that by 2033, all Housing Associations should aim to "be widely recognised as social enterprises: independent private bodies that exist for social good".

In many ways, this puts ACH ahead of the game. We will leave you with this uplifting video from Pioneers Post that reminds us that the time for social enterprise has certainly come.