

# The Good Business Times

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## THE STORIES BEHIND POSSABILITIES'S DRIVE FOR SOCIAL VALUE



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### New report shows £4.3 million of social value

PossAbilities launched its first ever social value report, **There's no business like good business**, for the year 2022-23, which showed a stunning performance.

Taking into account economic, social and environmental measures, the report revealed a social value contribution of £4.3 million. Amanda Higgs, who led this piece of research said "Doing good is our day job. Social value takes into account all of the other stuff that we do over and above our day job. It

shows our commitment to the communities that we work in".

Providers bidding to run services in local authorities increasingly have to commit to providing additional social value. Amanda added "It's one thing committing to delivering social value and another being able to prove it. We've invested in a system called LOOP, which enables us to track and monetise all the things we do. So now we have an evidence base and a benchmark so that we can look at how we can get even better".

## PossAbilities has got PRIDE

For the third consecutive year, we supported Manchester PRIDE in 2022. Organised by our LGBTQ+ group and attended by a wide range of staff and people that we support, we had one of the most vibrant floats in the parade.

Addy Dalman who co-ordinates the group said "Pride is just a great opportunity for us all to get together and show our support for others and promote tolerance and freedom of expression. We certainly expressed ourselves in true PossAbilities style".



# Christmas comes early to the tune of more than £600,000

Approaching Christmas 2022, there was a lot of doom and gloom around. Energy prices had gone through the roof; inflation was in double figures; and all the talk was about a cost of living crisis.

The PossAbilities board took this decision to try to lift the doom and gloom for our staff and their families and make sure that Christmas wasn't cancelled.

On the 8th December an unexpected postcard arrived with people's payslips along with a Love2Shop gift card. For most staff this was worth £1,000. Finance director Marilyn Smith said "We were so happy to be able to do this and lift

everyone's spirits. We make sure that we pay all the income tax and national insurance due on this money, so that staff who are eligible receive the full £1,000 without any deductions".

The gift came as a surprise to staff, and as well as the delighted smiles, there were tears of joy from some. Steve, the Chef at PossAbilities Social Lounge said "The gift meant so much to us, and came at just the right time. I handed mine over to my wife, after all she's been by my side since we met when we were twelve years old. We were able to buy some lovely presents for family and do something nice for ourselves"



In total PossAbilities gave out over £600,000 to staff, making it a very memorable Christmas.

# MILL DE GRAS: A vibrant festival celebrating Heywood's heritage



Quite by accident, we discovered that the PossAbilities HQ in Heywood was sitting on top of a fascinating story. When we built our wellbeing garden in 2015, a local resident said it was on the site of an old reservoir. We thought nothing more about it, until we built some apartments next door and found some cellars that were from old mill workers houses. Looking at historical maps, we could see that our HQ is built upon the site of the old Peel Street Mills.

Here was a story that had been buried and built over. We wanted to bring the story to life and when Historic England launched its Working Class Histories programme, they thought it would be a great idea to tell the story of Peel Street Mill and its people.

That's what we've done through a beautiful little book, and an animated walking trail. When the people we support floated the idea of having a carnival we saw a remarkable coincidence. Much of the cotton used in the Peel Street Mill came from Louisiana, as does

one of the world's great carnivals, Mardi Gras. We thought that it would be great to celebrate Heywood's mill town heritage Mardi Gras style, in an event that we called Mill de Gras.

A fabulous carnival paraded through the town, as an opening to an all-day festival in our wellbeing garden featuring live bands, circus acts and a funfair. Over 600 local people attended the event for free, weaving yet another story into the mill town heritage of the township.

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# Possabilities answers an SOS - Save our stables



PossAbilities CEO, Rachel Law, has a reputation for coming up with random ideas. One night when scrolling through local news she found an article and was moved by the story of a riding stables that was facing closure, unless it could raise £400,000 within six-months.

The landowner had given an ultimatum that the land would be sold to a third party and the stables would close if the money could not be found. That would mean the end of the 50-year history of Margaret Haes Riding Centre (MHRC), a charity which provides riding lessons to vulnerable adults as well as the local community.

Most people would have just felt sad and scrolled to the next article, or even sent a small donation to the JustGiving page. Yet Rachel had other ideas “We’ve got to save the stables” she said.

So, we set to work on a plan. The JustGiving page had raised about £18,000, so there was no chance of reaching the target. We had to think bigger and we had to think fast.

We identified grant funders who might be approached and supported MHRC to develop credible bids. Whilst we were doing this, we looked at the other side of the equation – could we renegotiate the price? Rachel said “We invited the landowner to meet us. Using a combination of logic, pulling at the heart strings and maybe a little charm, he agreed to sell for £300,000 ‘lock, stock and barrel’ provided we could get the money in time”.

Now there was the small matter of finding £300,000. Rachel added “It sounds simple when we say it, but we applied to the government for some levelling up funding and got £200,000, then a local benefactor added another £100,000. Voila – the riding stables was saved”.

Since then, Rachel has been working with the board of Trustees on a pro-bono basis to chart a new, financially sustainable future, and PossAbilities has adopted MHRC as its Charity of the Year.

It seems that in the world of PossAbilities, we do the impossible right away, and miracles don’t take very long either.

## IT’S TIPI TIME

When we built our one acre wellbeing garden in 2015, we had no idea how successful we would be in engaging with a wide range of groups and interest.

We realised that so many things were going on that we were running out of room. So, we dug out a large portion of hillside and built a giant tipi, capable of seating up to 32 people. It’s created a whole new space for the people we support and the whole community.

Already, it’s been the venue for the launch of a film premiere and the visit of the GM Mayor Andy Burnham; been the base for our Cherwell Chipmunks Day Camp; a music venue for the Mill de Gras festival; a yoga studio; an arts and crafts centre; and much more.

It’s a totally flexible space that people love being in, and its open to the whole community.



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# The People's Living Room



When the Ukraine war pushed up fuel prices, we were concerned to hear that some older people felt that they could not afford to have their heating on. In a cold winter that's more than just uncomfortable, it could be seriously bad for the health of the most vulnerable.

We have our heating on all of the time, and we have a bit of space in our Social Lounge where we have a fully functioning café; a TV; games; and good company.

It's just like being in your own living room, so we invited anyone in the local area to switch their heating off and come on in. We called it The People's Living Room – a place where you can make yourself feel right at home, and lower your heating bills.

## THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

At PossAbilities, as Christmas approaches, there's always lots of things going on such as parties, Christmas jumpers, and Secret Santa's.

We could get lost in the merriment and forget about the world outside, but as a Community Interest Company the outside is part of our world – especially at Christmas.

Once again, we transformed our garden into Santa's Grotto, complete with elves and live reindeer, and invited local

children to visit the Big Man himself. They all came away with a gift and memories that will stay with them for a lifetime.

In all of the communities that we were working in, Rochdale; Oldham; Calderdale; Halton; and Stockport; we made up 360 Christmas Hampers and distributed them to people most in need. It's a great feeling to put these together and load up our van. It's good to do good.

