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Business Clinic project positions Dandelion for growth

A talented team of students have plotted a path to growth for a social enterprise that builds confidence and wellbeing among children and young people.

Clara May Warden established Dandelion Confidence community interest company (CIC) with the aim of empowering children to feel happier, calmer and more self-confident in the face of life's challenges. She works with

schools, parents, carers and pupil referral units to deliver group-based workshops, one-to-one sessions and forest activities – events that usually take place in nature – to improve students’ self-esteem and give them a real sense of achievement.

Currently Clara is the only employee within the business, a role that takes up a lot of her time, and she needed help from the Business Clinic to develop a comprehensive business growth strategy that would enable her to expand her client base.

The students launched the project with a detailed analysis of North East and national CICs, focusing on how they grow their networks and support children’s confidence development. Online research involved reviewing previous studies, conducting competitor analysis and identifying services offered in other regions that could inspire new opportunities for Dandelion to explore.

After conducting a thorough audit to assess Dandelion’s strengths, limitations and capabilities, the students identified key target audiences including parents, schools, other educational organisations and children who gained their education outside of school. A menu of recommendations was then designed to help Dandelion reach these audiences via a range of strategies in a bid to grow the client base.

Sabrina Begum led the student team, supported by fellow finance and investment management students Niyaz Khan, James Lewis and Luqman Suliman.

She said: “The recommendations were based on a combination of data analysis, market trends and best practices from academic literature. We prioritised strategies that aligned with Dandelion’s strengths and addressed the organisation’s key challenges to ensure that the recommendations were practical and sustainable.”

The primary recommendation was to implement a social media strategy that would increase engagement on Dandelion’s social channels – primarily Facebook and Instagram – and give the company a clear brand identity. Currently these channels are not achieving sufficient engagement, mainly because posts often share information rather than directly engage with Dandelion’s intended audiences, limiting the organisation’s ability to build a

strong, active community.

Also on the menu of options was a distinctive logo that would reflect Dandelion's brand values, and the introduction of a review service that would allow the organisation to monitor and respond to customer feedback.



Another key recommendation was to identify tools, such as QuickBooks and Monday.com, that would help Dandelion streamline its financial management and customer relationship management (CRM) processes. Building regional partnerships with like-minded organisations and gaining nationally certified accreditations, such as those offered by the Forest School Association, would enable Dandelion to boost its credibility and give confidence to customers and funders that its practitioners are well-trained, competent and trustworthy.

Clara May Warden said: “A close look at the findings highlighted several issues, including a clear need to engage better with private clients and educational institutions, improve our social media engagement and increase the robustness of our financial and organisational management capability. One of the student surveys found that no clients had found our services through social media or the website; it was mainly through word of mouth, via schools or through previous professional relationships. This told us that

we had to up our game when it came to engaging with our audiences via these channels.

“The project was a worthwhile experience in that the students’ innovative ideas and fresh perspectives gave me a sharp insight into where the business needed to improve. Their energy, enthusiasm and creativity was a real bonus and I’d definitely recommend the Business Clinic to other CICs that are seeking new ways to grow their client base.”

Sabrina Begum said: “It was a great experience to work on this project, which enhanced my problem-solving skills, taught me the importance of teamwork and deepened my understanding of how academic theories translate into business practice. It provided practical exposure to business consulting and strategy development, skills that are highly valuable in the finance industry and will help me in my new role as a Premier Relationship Manager at HSBC.”

Students work at the Business Clinic in their final year of study, offering clients a full consultancy experience that encompasses activities as diverse as feasibility studies including finance, investment and growth; HR including recruitment, retention and diversity; marketing including branding and digital; business analytics; logistics and supply chain management. The aim of each project is to undertake research and make recommendations that will benefit organisations in the short and long term.

Ed Cottam, director of the Business Clinic, said: “Sabrina and her team have made a positive impression on a social enterprise that does so much good work in building self-esteem and wellbeing among the next generation of talent.

“This project exemplifies the value of the experiential learning that we offer students and our programme has benefited many social enterprises since it was launched 12 years ago.”

The Business Clinic has delivered 870 consultancy projects involving more than 3,500 students across all business subjects since it was founded in 2013. It offers pro-bono consultancy support to SMEs, multi-national organisations, charitable organisations, educational trusts and social enterprises that operate across a wide range of sectors, both in the North East of England as well as further afield in the UK and overseas.

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