



Mud, sweat and tears: Forth Sector

➔ Customer care wins out for the Edinburgh social firm doing Scottish Rugby Union's dirty work.

Forth Sector is an Edinburgh-based family of eight social firms dedicated to creating jobs for people with severe enduring mental health problems. Its businesses include the award-winning Six Mary's Place guesthouse, The Wood Works recycling business, The Soap Co. Edinburgh which operates from the heart of the Royal Mile, and laundry, embroidery and catering firms. Forth Sector recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and now turns over more than £1.5m annually.

➔ The maxim 'it's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it' could have been coined for the challenge faced by Jane Fox's team at Parkview Laundry, one of the longest-running social firms managed by Edinburgh's Forth Sector. For nearly a decade, they have had the unenviable task of cleaning the muddy jerseys of Scotland's elite rugby players.

Its current contract with the Scottish Rugby Union (SRU) means Parkview is responsible for washing, drying and pressing kit for all of the country's representative sides, from the Under-12s up to the senior men's and women's squads.

Current team manager at the SRU is Guy Richardson. He takes charge of all off-field matters relating to the national sides, including the kit, and he is fulsome in his praise for the service Parkview provides. "We have a great relationship with all their staff and they are a pleasure to work with.

"You have to understand we can be quite a demanding customer. Things like bad weather and changes in coaching decisions impact massively on the service we need from Parkview. That's just the nature of the beast. A wet Monday training session means forty-five pieces of very muddy kit must be cleaned, dried and returned to us for first thing Tuesday morning.



A certain quality: Haven Products

➔ Working with National Semiconductor (UK) Ltd, Scotland's trailblazing social firm shows why quality must come first.

Haven Products is one of Scotland's most successful social firms, running commercial businesses which create meaningful employment for people with disabilities. The company operates from sites in Glasgow, Hillington and Inverness and provides out-sourced solutions for a number of major blue chip companies. Haven was successful in the national Enterprising Solutions social enterprise awards in 2007 and was named Scottish Business in the Community's SME of the Year in 2006.

➔ Haven Products can arguably boast better private sector connections than any other social enterprise in Scotland. Its customer list includes many of the top blue chip firms with bases in Scotland, including IBM, Morgan Stanley, Johnson and Johnson, John Dewar and Son, Kwik Fit Insurance, and National Semiconductor.

Haven's pre-eminence is in part due to its longevity. The venture was founded by the Red Cross in 1946 as a means of offering meaningful employment for veterans returning from the Second World War. It subsequently operated as an independent company and is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Momentum Scotland, one of the country's biggest social care charities. It currently operates three factory sites, providing outsourced services to large public and private organizations. Its social mission is to create real jobs for people with a range of disabilities, who make up over 80% of its workforce

The greatest factor in Haven's success has been its willingness to compete in the marketplace where other social firms have seldom ventured.

Managing Director David Whyte explains: "We specialise in taking non-core work from large corporates, including multinationals. We do things like packing, labeling, and secure disposal. These are nuisance activities to big organisations, but they still need doing.



Goodwill and good business sense: Badaguish Cairngorm Outdoor Centre

➔ The Highland community of Kincaig is showing how social enterprise can spread the benefits of tourism.

Badaguish Cairngorm Outdoor Centre is one of the UK's premier outdoor activity centres catering for people with disabilities. Managed by a registered charity, the Speyside Trust, the Centre delivers a wide range of activities and organises large outdoor events and challenges. It is one of the largest employers in the local area with 15 full-time equivalent staff, and it has a turnover of £630,000. It has recently started a new venture aimed at supporting disabled people through training and into employment.

➔ In 1980 – long before the term social entrepreneur entered the lexicon – Andrew Mackenzie, then a countryside ranger for the Rothiemurchus estate near Aviemore, embarked on a 'wee pilot' to see what could be done to improve access for disabled people. Now some 28 years later, that 'wee pilot' has become Badaguish Cairngorm Outdoor Centre, a thriving £630k-a-year social business, and Andrew is its chief executive.

Badaguish has developed in two ways. Firstly it operates as an outdoor activity centre, used by schools, colleges, youth or community groups and private individuals. This generates income to support the centre's charitable work, which involves providing specialised residential packages that allow disabled people to attend unaccompanied, providing 24-hour respite for carers.

From the start Badaguish has been led by the needs of the local community and initial support from the project came from local businesses, in particular through the Rotary Club.

As Andrew explains, their support was prompted by more than just altruism. "Some traders were wise enough to realise that here was a client group that wasn't being catered for and that they didn't know how to access. We were able to combine the feelgood factor of improving access to the outdoors with real business opportunities that could boost the local economy and also community confidence. It was a brave move, at the time there was nothing else like it in Scotland and there was also a real fear of working with disabled people."



Flooring the competition: Spruce Carpets

➔ How working with a community recycling firm is giving Scotland's biggest contract flooring company, Veitchi (Scotland) Ltd, a competitive advantage.

Spruce Carpets pioneered carpet and carpet tile re-use in the UK and has won a national award for innovation in recycling. It processes donations of good quality carpets and carpet tiles otherwise destined for landfill and provides a supply and fit service using the refurbished product. It also provides training and volunteer opportunities for people looking to re-enter the labour market. Trading for just over two years, the Govan-based community business now employs 9 staff and has a turnover of more than £250,000.

➔ When Spruce Carpets started out, even the most fervent of social enterprise supporters were sceptical about whether or not it would work. Reuse of furniture and white goods was a well established avenue for social enterprise, but second-hand carpets?

Spruce has since turned such received wisdom on its head. It has grown to become a £1/4m company within two years, creating 9 local jobs and diverting more than 100 tonnes of waste from landfill.

Chief Executive Izzie Johnston says the simplicity of Spruce's offer is key. "We do what we say on the tin. We supply and fit floor coverings, and we do it well.

"Dealing with a single waste stream means our operations side runs efficiently and our sales and marketing can be better targeted. We demand professional standards of all our staff and customers are repeatedly impressed with the quality of our product and service. Some people might be surprised by our success, but we've always been very focused and we want to make the Spruce concept work. We're not 100% self-sufficient yet, but we're well on track."

Like any business involved in recycling or reuse, one of the biggest challenges Spruce faces is ensuring a regular, good quality supply. Vital to Spruce's success in this area has been the partnerships it has formed with key players in the carpet industry. Leading manufacturers donate end-of-line stock, national



Survival of the fittest: Edinburgh Cyrenians

➔ How an open-minded attitude to business brings Standard Life Plc into helping a homelessness charity with its transition to social enterprise.

Edinburgh Cyrenians was founded in 1968 to provide practical help and support to homeless people. It now helps over 1,000 a year and its services include Cyrenians Farm, a residential community and working farm outside Edinburgh, the Good Food programme, which manages a FareShare franchise for redistributing food from retailers to homeless kitchens, and support services around issues like employment, drugs and resettlement. It is also launching a number of new social enterprise ventures, and in 2007 its director Des Ryan won Scottish Business in the Community's Sieff Award for the individual who has done the most to develop links between sectors.

➔ The theory of evolution works because those adaptations which are not fit for purpose are phased out. Scotland's third sector is now growing into a more enterprising beast – a move that Edinburgh Cyrenians Director Des Ryan sees as righting an old evolutionary hiccup.

"The voluntary sector really grew up as a professional sector in the 1970s, but it did so largely by trying to emulate and win the approval of the public sector. Actually, in my view, we in the third sector have always had a closer natural affinity with the private sector. Successful charities have to be entrepreneurial, customer focused, quick to adapt and driven by a need to see and demonstrate results, be it to investors, shareholders or ourselves."

According to Ryan, his organisation is better equipped than most to deal with this paradigm shift. Since the mid-1990s Cyrenians has implemented a Working with Business strategy and its private partners include Standard Life, KPMG and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Ryan says, "We consciously devote energy to developing relationships with the private sector. Business can provide us with many practical benefits, but our approach also has a philosophical basis.



Steering a path to success: Aberdeen Foyer

➔ A pioneering private-social partnership with Roadwise Driver Training Ltd is making young dreams come true.

Aberdeen Foyer is a registered charity with an annual turnover of £4.5m. The Foyer provides supported housing to homeless and vulnerable young people and access to learning, training and employment opportunities along with advice on a wide range of health matters to the wider community. Foyer Enterprise, the Foyer's trading arm, runs a number of successful social enterprises, including one of Aberdeen's top restaurants, a graphic design company, and a Ben & Jerry's Partnership.

➔ Aberdeen Foyer makes a habit of overcoming vicious circles. The Foyer concept is all about helping homeless young people to break the 'no home-no job-no home' cycle and get their lives back on track.

So when young people who had been through the Foyer's job training programmes told managers they still couldn't get work because they didn't have a driving licence, the idea for the charity's latest social enterprise venture, Foyer Drive, was born.

Foyer Drive Coordinator Allan Farmer explains: "The idea of a social enterprise driving school really came from our young people. They told us that the fact they couldn't get a licence was a barrier to getting a job.

"The costs of learning to drive are prohibitive – instructors in the area charge up to £30 per hour, making it practically impossible for anyone living on benefits to take lessons. We developed a model where we can provide 20 hours of training for 12 young people a year at a subsidised rate of £8 per hour."

Foyer Drive sells commercial training packages to individuals and advanced or defensive safe driving sessions to local organisations enabling them to meet health and safety requirements for staff; fulfilling corporate social responsibility and business needs simultaneously. The profits generated are used to offset the reduced rates for the Foyer's young clients.