Sandy Row Community Forum / Days Hotel Belfast:

A Case Study in Successful Employability

Project Supported by:

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

Early in 2003 the Sandy Row Community Forum (SRCF) – supported by the South Belfast Partnership Board (SBPB), Belfast Gems (GEMS) and South Belfast Employment Office of the Department for Employment & Learning (DEL) – undertook steps to develop an initiative toward improving the employability of Sandy Row residents.

At the same time the construction of the £12 million Days Hotel (3 Star) on a derelict site adjacent to Sandy Row provided a potential opportunity to work with a large local employer toward establishing enhanced access to employment for local jobseekers. SRCF sought to find ways to work with both the employer and local residents toward overcoming perceived and actual barriers to recruitment / employment with the purpose of assisting local jobseekers into accessible and sustainable employment.

1.2 Rationale & Methodology

Recent efforts by SPBP and government departments – in particular DEL – have sought to encourage local employers toward making employment opportunities more widely accessible. While anecdotal evidence points to resulting benefits for both an increased range of job seekers and also participant companies and communities, specific examples of such benefits are rare and under investigated. Accordingly SBPB / DEL commissioned this short study to examine the processes, strengths and weaknesses of the integrated Sandy Row Community Forum / Days Hotel Belfast Employability Initiative.

The principal method of data capture was via a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with participant groups (employer, community organisation and a selection of those successful in obtaining work). The report outlines the key stages of involvement between the community forum and the employer toward establishing a local demand-led employability programme before moving on to examine the barriers and bridges to participation from the perspective of employer, community organisation and local jobseeker.
1.3 Key Themes

Rationales for involvement were focussed around the core business areas of each of the participants - community organisations wishing to maximise potential opportunities and benefits for local residents; local jobseekers wishing to obtain new or better employment (better hours, better pay, closer to home) and the employer wishing to engage a new and necessary supply of labour, while assisting a relatively deprived community.

Irrespective of individual rationales for participation the collaborative efforts led to a number of key lessons. In general, all parties benefited from an increased awareness of training and employment opportunities arising from the Employer-Community collaboration while specific assistance available from SRCF led to additional benefits for local jobseekers.

By providing ‘pre-recruitment support’ with regard to completing CV’s and providing interview training SRCF were able to assist local residents toward first securing an interview and then a job while ensuring those candidates presenting themselves to the employer were not only increasingly interested in the type of work on offer but where able to provide the information required by the employer during the interview process.

The localisation of the interview process (held within the community) and the willingness of the employer to visit community centres and engage with residents not only encouraged applicants regarding their chance of obtaining employment but in doing so, and as a result of positive word of mouth, dramatically increased the number of those presenting themselves for further information and / or interview. A mark of this success is that from an initial pool of 22 applicants who applied to initial publicity, subsequent word of mouth led to some 200 eventually being interviewed.

Similar benefits were realised via processes of ‘post-recruitment support’. SRCF provided an ad-hoc and informal community advice service whereby those who successfully obtained work where assisted to settle into their new employment – for example providing advice on wages, payroll and seeking to minimise the effect of any teething problems associated with adapting to a new environment. The employer was encouraged by relatively low turnover, attributing at least part of this to the gratitude associated with having engaged the community and having delivered on a promise of providing accessible employment. Areas for improvement did however arise – for example, closely associated with applicants’ lack of confidence with regard to CV’s and job interviews, those successful in obtaining employment have been reluctant to take promotion when offered by the employer, clearly
reducing the effectiveness and benefits of the process for both individual and employer.

Overall, the additional costs (time / effort) for the employer of participation and training were see as balanced by lower turnover, a workforce perceived as increasingly flexible and reliable because of its proximity to the site of employment and the positive word of mouth engendered by resulting community spirit and gratitude. The views of participants (employer, community organisation and jobseekers) and lessons from other similar work point to a key advantage of the process being in a sustained and linked employability effort whereby the opportunity of direct access to a ‘real’ job not only provides added incentive to participate in training schemes but when tightly integrated with community assistance, the seamless nature of such processes means that participants can be guided from initial advice, through capacity building programmes, toward open days, job application and interview assistance. Those successful in obtaining employment further benefit from post-employment support, while those not successful benefit from support and advice regarding other job opportunities and associated capacity building / training.

Overall the Employer-Community collaboration process led to over 200 requests for further information from local residents, led to a dramatic uptake in community based capacity building programmes (e.g. CV services and interview assistance etc) and resulted, as part of the initial recruitment process in 21 local residents gaining work, a majority (13) of whom are still with the Hotel at the time of writing, some 5 months later.

1.4 Recommendations

The report concludes with a number of detailed recommendations seeking to summarise key steps in the process and intended to be of utility in informing future similar Employer-Community interactions. In brief these can be summarised as follows:

- **General Approach**: Establish a local employability working group representative of service providers and local communities to provide resources/expertise and where possible to act as a single point of contact for the employer. Identify potential business benefits such as decreased turnover, a widened labour supply, a potential workforce balancing effect, enhanced public relations and the ability of the community organisations to assist in the recruitment, screening and pre-employment preparation of potential candidates as unique selling points for an Employer-Community collaboration process. Seek to ensure that efforts to promote employer-focussed employability at the local level are balanced with wider considerations of fair participation.

- **Pre-Recruitment Phase**: Schedule key dates with regard to any future potential recruitment
exercises and proactively work with employers and the local community to ensure capacity-building programmes can be sequenced accordingly. Seek to minimise any barriers to participation by encouraging employers to review entrance requirements and methods of application (e.g. Application Form versus CV) and selection. Encourage the employer to visit local communities to promote opportunities and demonstrate commitment.

- **Recruitment Phase:** Recognise the value of the collaborative (Employer-Community) process in persuading individuals to participate and the value of direct communication between employer and potential jobseekers. Encourage Community visits and open days accordingly alongside information and advice on the nature of employment available, flexibility in shifts, wages, available tax credits and personal / community development. Recognise the value of linking with partner organisations such as neighbouring communities, GEMS and the Employment Service to provide resources and share expertise. Seek to increase local awareness of opportunities and provide capacity building / support in making employment applications. Consider asking the employer to subsidise the cost of these (and possibly other) outreach efforts as a form of low cost advertising and community engagement. Consider the possibility of delegating the scheduling of interviews to the local community organisation and of holding the interviews locally to increase participation from those potentially intimidated by the interview process.

- **Post-Recruitment Phase:** For those successful in the recruitment exercise provide further specific advice on available tax credits, payroll, contracts etc as well as facilitating an informal community information network where appointees can raise queries / issues that they might not otherwise raise (e.g. with the employer). Seek to relay key themes of concern / benefit to the employer toward improving conditions, particularly for those returning to work. Offer capacity building courses with regard to work-based skills and confidence building toward assisting with retention and promotion etc. For those unsuccessful - initiate a series of employer facilitated signposting measures, providing information on alternative avenues (option to reapply, other employment, community assistance, government training etc) helping to ensure those interested in employment opportunities remain engaged with the labour market. Overall, obtain feedback from participants (employer, partner organisations, community) on costs / benefits experienced and if / how the process could be improved. Use this information to improve / promote future Employer-Community interaction measures.
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2 Introduction

Early in 2003 the Sandy Row Community Forum – supported by the South Belfast Partnership Board (SBPB), Belfast Gems (GEMS) and South Belfast Employment Office of the Department for Employment & Learning (DEL) – undertook steps to develop an initiative toward improving the employability of Sandy Row residents. At the same time the construction of the Days Hotel on a site adjacent to Sandy Row provided a potential opportunity to work with a large (local) employer toward seeking enhanced access to employment for local jobseekers. The resulting efforts sought to find ways to work with both the employer and local residents toward overcoming perceived and actual barriers to recruitment / employment with the purpose of assisting local jobseekers into accessible and sustainable employment.

With regard to this report, the South Belfast Partnership Board have an interest in understanding such employability processes from both demand and supply side perspectives toward improving the accessibility of employment across South Belfast, specifically with regard to marginalised groups and communities as is evidenced in their pivotal role in programmes such as the Gasworks Employment Matching Service (GEMS) and in their assistance to groups such as the Sandy Row Community Forum. DEL's Research and Evaluation Branch, in their role of conducting research into employability, were also keen to improve their understanding of how this initiative achieved a higher degree of success than is usual\(^1\). Accordingly SBPB / DEL commissioned this short study to examine the processes, strengths and weaknesses of the integrated Sandy Row Community Forum / Days Hotel Belfast Employability Initiative (see Appendix 6 for further information regarding the commissioning organisations).

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\(^1\) See, for example, DEL’s Labour Market Bulletin No. 14, Chapter 12.
3 Policy Context

Access to Employment is a theme that has received increased attention over recent years. The European Commission identified ‘employability’ as one of four core pillars (alongside developing entrepreneurship and job creation; encouraging adaptability of businesses and their employees and strengthening equal opportunity policies for women and men) when it announced a wide-ranging European Employment Strategy (EES) in 1997. While a revised strategy (March 2003) saw a re-organisation of the approach (and the now familiar term ‘employability’ largely removed) the underlying themes remained and now focussed more directly on supporting the EU Lisbon summit (2000) goals of sustained economic growth alongside ‘full employment’, ‘quality and productivity at work’ and ‘social cohesion via an inclusive labour market’.

These revised goals of the EES are particularly relevant in Northern Ireland where social cohesion is an important issue and long-term unemployment is still recognised as a significant problem. The establishment in recent years of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the DEL led Interdepartmental Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment and revised government policy initiatives such as New Targeting Social Need point to this importance.

Importantly however, while it is recognised that ‘employability’ processes depend on the balance between ‘supply’ (e.g. individual knowledge, skills and household background) and ‘demand’ (e.g. the economic and social context within which work is being sought) much of the emphasis within UK employment policy remains focussed largely on the importance of individual (supply side) characteristics in influencing outcomes in the labour market with little detailed focus on the important role that demand side characteristics can play in shaping labour market outcomes.

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2 The NI Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment defined Employability as ‘the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible employment’.

3 Supply Side Programmes are however increasingly interacting with the demand side with, for example,
4 Rationale

Recent efforts by the SPBP and government departments such as DEL have sought to encourage employers toward making employment opportunities more widely accessible via carefully tailored changes to recruitment / employment practices and via Employer-Community interactions. However while anecdotal evidence points to resulting benefits for both an increased range of jobseekers (now able to access such employment) and also participant companies and communities, specific examples of such benefits are rare and under investigated.

The rationale of this proposed study, developed from the above, is to adopt a case study approach to examine one such interaction between a new employer (the Days Hotel) and local community representatives (Sandy Row Community Forum) toward providing information in recognition of the processes, pitfalls and potential benefits accruable through enhanced demand-side employability measures and Employer-Community interactions.

Information derived would not only be of benefit to the SBPB in advising on future Employer-Community interactions but could also provide input into a wider policy debate facilitated by, for example, the work of the Taskforce on Employability and Long-term Unemployment, the Equality Commission and / or DEL’s Research & Evaluation Branch.

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New Deal now includes Pre-Employment Programmes (PEP) which allow for subsidised training placements within Employers
5 Methodology

The project sponsors have asked for a speedy and timely overview of the processes and pitfalls / benefits to date. The proposed methodology is designed to reflect this urgent need, to work within certain time constraints and the availability of the participant employer.

The study thus seeks to provide:

1. A case study overview of the co-ordinated approach taken by the Sandy Row Community Forum and the Days Hotel Belfast toward improving the social accessibility of a range of employment opportunities.

2. An overview of any value inherent in the processes involved from the perspective of the employer, the local community (as represented by the community forum) and jobseekers engaged via the resulting processes, where possible contextualised using information from other studies undertaken by the author regarding service sector job creations within Belfast.

5.1 Research Design

The principal method of data capture was via a series of semi-structured interviews and analysis as follows:

1. Employer Perspectives - Using qualitative interviews with Human Resources staff from the Days Hotel Belfast, a broad based discussion of the labour supply requirements and how the implementation of enhanced accessibility measures may have served to shape recruitment.

2. Community Perspectives - Using qualitative interviews with members of the Sandy Row Community Forum, an overview of processes involved in engaging the employer, local community and local jobseekers along with a consideration of any pitfalls and benefits noted.

3. Employee Perspectives - Using qualitative interviews with a majority of the 13 Sandy Row residents currently employed with Days Hotel who were recruited via the local outreach, an overview of the barriers and opportunities noted by those
jobseekers that had sought and / or obtained work within the Days Hotel as a result of the enhanced accessibility measures.

4. **Local Contextualisation** – Utilising additional interview material drawn from work previously undertaken by the author with other local employers and communities, processes developed by the Sandy Row Community Forum and the Days Hotel Belfast are further contextualised toward identifying any general lessons that could be of benefit to future employer-community interactions.

### 5.2 Research Themes

While outlining the processes to date, interviews with each of the above groups will seek to address:

- Rationale for becoming involved
- Views on processes / stages of involvement with respect to interaction between participants
- Reflection on the value attributed to the process of employer-community interaction.

Additionally the research will seek to uncover any inherent value in the process by examining:

- How circumstances and outcomes have changed through participation
- Factors influencing that change
- How such processes might be replicated / improved with respect to future programmes.

Examples of research questions / interview schedules are contained in Appendices 1-3
6 Participant Profiles

6.1 Days Hotel

Opened on 28 May 2003, the £12 million Days Hotel (3 Star) is located on former waste ground on Hope Street immediately adjacent to the Sandy Row area and in close proximity (less than 1km) to the centre of Belfast. With 244 rooms, it is reported (2003) to be the largest hotel in Northern Ireland and would initially create approximately 40 jobs at a range of occupation levels with an expected increase to approximately 80-100 jobs over a two-year period.

Developed by the Andras House Group, it is one of a number of Belfast hotels including the Ramada, Express by Holiday Inn and Renshaws, which make the Andras House Group the largest hotel operator in Belfast. The site on which the hotel stands will be further developed by the Andras house group in the immediate future to encompass the ‘Lincoln Centre’ (a family entertainment venue) and a 4 Star Hotel.

6.2 Sandy Row Community Forum

Sandy Row Community Forum was established in 1996 as an umbrella organisation of community groups, local churches, local youth clubs, community centres and commercial interests in the area of Sandy Row and Lower Donegall Road with the aim of “working together to improve the social, economic and environmental conditions in the area to help create a better quality of life for the people of Sandy Row and the Lower Donegall Road”.

The Forum currently has 11 constituent member groups and employs 5 staff – 3 of which are from the local community. The Forum also manages 5 local projects – Play Development Project, Surestart, South Belfast Highway to Health, Sandy Row Community Regeneration Scheme and the Action Plan Bid for Multi Sports / Boxing Club. The Forum is an active member of the South Belfast Partnership Board and is currently involved in their Targeted Capacity Programme and Youth Education & Social Inclusion Partnership.
6.3 Local Area / Community

By way of broad context, the following area profiles are reproduced from the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (Source: NISRA). The first of these provides information for the ward (Shaftesbury) in which the Sandy Row area and Days Hotel are located. The second relates specifically to the much smaller 2001 Census Output Area (COA) comprising the immediate area within which the Days Hotel is located. A map showing the location of these areas relative to the Sandy Row area is presented in Appendix 5 (Source: NISRA).

In viewing these profiles it should be noted that the Sandy Row area (and that which the Community Forum serves) encompasses a number of adjacent COA’s making up only part of the Shaftesbury Ward and thus the following profiles will at best only provide insights into the profile of the Sandy Row area and residents thereof. A full and formal profile of the Sandy Row area is beyond the scope of this document.

6.3.1 Ward Level - SHAFTESBURY

- **Demography** - On Census Day, the resident population of SHAFTESBURY ward was 5785. Of this 19% were under 16 years old and 22% aged 60 and over. On Census Day, 48% of the population of SHAFTESBURY were male, 37% were from a Catholic Community Background and 58% were from a ‘Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)’ Community Background. In SHAFTESBURY there were 57 births and 84 deaths registered in 2001. In total 72% of births were to unmarried mothers.

- **Health and Care** - On Census Day, in SHAFTESBURY ward 33% of people had a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability and 10% of the population noted that they provided unpaid care to family, friends, neighbours or others. In 2002, residents of SHAFTESBURY had 3395 hospital episodes. In 2003 approximately 23% of the population aged under 65 were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. Finally, in 2001 35% of children aged 3-5 were registered with a dentist.

- **Housing and Transport** - On Census Day there were 2952 households in
SHAFTESBURY ward. Of these households 23% were 'Owner Occupied'. In this area 34% of households had access to a car or van. In 2002, 4528 cars were licensed to addresses in SHAFTESBURY.

- **Education, Employment and Economic Activity** - On Census Day, in SHAFTESBURY ward 14% of the population aged 16-74 had degree level or higher qualifications. On Census Day there were 1725 people aged 16-74 in employment, of which 46% were female. In total 7% of people aged 16-74 were unemployed. Of those who left school in 2001, 23% gained 5 or more GCSEs at grade C and above. Finally in 2001 70% of the school population were entitled to free school meals.

### 6.3.2 Census Output Area Level - 95GG390012

All statistics in this profile are based on the 2001 Census.

- **People, Families and Households** - The resident population of Output Area 95GG390012 was 262. Of this 26% were under 16 years old and 32% aged 60 and over. In this area 50% of the population were male. In Output Area 95GG390012, 8% were from a Catholic Community Background and 91% were from a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' Community Background. In this Output Area there were 142 households.

- **Health and Care** - In 95GG390012, 43% of people had a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability and 9% of the population noted that they provided unpaid care to family, friends, neighbours or others.

- **Housing and Transport** - On Census Day there were 142 households in Output Area 95GG390012. Of these households, 11% were 'Owner Occupied'. In total 21% of households had access to a car or van.

- **Education, Employment and Economic Activity** - In Output Area 95GG390012 4% of the population aged 16-74 had degree level or higher qualifications. On Census Day there were 46 people aged 16-74 in employment, of which 57% were female. In total 5% of people aged 16-74 were unemployed.
7 Overview of Employer-community Interaction

As outlined in the above methodology, this study has two broad aims - to outline the employer–community interaction approach adopted to date and also to provide insights into any inherent value in the process with recommendations to how this may be improved or replicated elsewhere. This section deals with the first of these aims by providing an overview of the co-ordinated approach taken by the Sandy Row Community Forum and the Days Hotel Belfast toward improving the social accessibility of a range of employment opportunities.

7.1 Background context

Reflective of the wider labour market for hospitality vacancies, the background to this process is a general lack of response to community organised hospitality programmes with both GEMS and SRCF reporting low response rates to opportunities within the hospitality sector and related training courses.

The establishment of the Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment and programmes such as DEL’s Bridge to Employment have supplemented the wider influence of the European Employment Strategy in promoting co-ordinated efforts between Government employment services, community groups and employers. Locally, the creation in March 2003 of a Sandy Row Employability Working Group (comprising members of SRCF, GEMS and DEL’s Employment Service) was reflective of a desire to improve conditions, particularly with respect to both youth and adult unemployment in the area by for example arranging accompanied visits to the South Belfast JobCentre (located in Gloucester House) and promoting personal development programmes and IT training etc. through local youth and community groups.

The subsequent announcement by the Andras House Group regarding its plans to develop an area of waste ground adjacent to the Sandy Row area to comprise initially the 3 Star Days Hotel with the subsequent addition of a family entertainment venue and a 4 Star Hotel provided an unprecedented opportunity for SRCF to work toward placing local jobseekers within accessible employment.
7.2 Key Stages of Involvement

The following provides a brief overview of the stages of involvement between SRCF and Days Hotel Belfast, outlining the employer-community interaction approach adopted to date.

- **2001** – Andras Group visit SRCF to announce the proposed hotel development; engage local community support; increase awareness of job opportunities (to likely include a range of general service posts encompassing housekeeping, food & beverage, front of house, security, portering, kitchen staff etc) most accessible to those without qualifications / recent work experience and to indicate that the hotel were willing to work with local communities toward assisting local jobseekers into work.

- **February 2003** – SRCF make tentative plans to provide an awareness day (incorporating employer participation) for local women’s / youth groups with regard to employment in the Days Hotel. Additionally this would be supplemented by advance capacity building to include general pre-employment skills, job-application workshops and mock-interviews scheduled to coincide and complete in time for any advertisement of job vacancies by the Days Hotel. SRCF contact Andras House Human Resources to make them aware of their plans, Andras House indicate that they are keen to facilitate.

- **21 March 2003** – Days Hotel advertise a range of management vacancies in Belfast Telegraph. For reasons of cost efficiency, also included is a full range of general service staff vacancies inviting applications by CV with a closing date of 4th April (2 weeks).

- **23 March 2003** – SRCF staff retrospectively become aware of the job advertisement via the local press. Unprepared due to the lack of recent communication and any advance notice regarding the advertisement date and because of the relatively short deadline for applications, SRCF move quickly to make local residents aware of the opportunities by leafleting every house in the Sandy Row area over the next two days with a copy of the newspaper advertisement and offering “information & advice on making an application” (see Appendix 4 for copy of flyer).

- **24 March 2003** – SRCF make concerted efforts to contact Days Hotel Human
Resources to clarify how if Days Hotel can work with SRCF toward assisting local jobseekers into employment.

○ **3 April 2003** – SRCF meet with Days Hotel Human Resources who confirm that they are willing to work with SRCF toward assisting local jobseekers into employment. Discussions centre on the initial recruitment and the possibility of subsequent events to include open-days; community facilitated employer-targeted training and a possible Bridge to Employment Scheme. Later in the day both parties meet with DEL’s South & East Belfast Employment Service who outline the range of government programmes and assistance.

○ **April 2003** – 22 people take advantage of SRCF CV service whereby they are assisted to identify relevant skills and to complete a standardised CV template. Advice is also given on working tax credits etc. Upon receipt of their applications Days Hotel are able to offer all 22 an interview, itself an indicator of the importance of such community based services.

○ **April 2003** – Days Hotel ask SRCF to schedule interviews times, for the 22 SRCF applicants, over two days in late April to be held locally within the Sandy Row Resource Centre.

○ **April 2003** – Local jobseekers continue to contact SRCF in response to the flyer and to growing word of mouth regarding possible opportunities within the Days Hotel. In the absence of further input from Days Hotel they are advised that the application process is now closed but are invited to leave their contact details in the event of subsequent opportunities.

○ **28 April 2003** – SRCF offer pre-interview training to the 22 applicants scheduled for an interview later in the week intended to assist them in bringing out key attributes and experience within their respective interviews. It is estimated that slightly more than half take up the offer.

○ **29 April 2003** – Days Hotel Human Resource Manager undertakes initial interviews at the Sandy Row Community Centre as scheduled. SRCF offer additional pre-interview advice as required immediately prior to individual interviews.
- **29/30 April 2003** – Friends / relatives accompany those turning up for scheduled interviews - keen to learn more about potential opportunities and, if possible, to submit applications. Following discussion between Days Hotel HR and SRCF it is decided that those interested in applying can be allowed to complete the SRCF standardised CV template and, subject to the quality of their application, can be interviewed immediately (as part of a small group of peers).

- **29 April - 2 May 2003** – Those who had previously chosen to leave their contact details with SRCF are contacted and invited to visit the resource centre and complete a standardised CV template with pre-interview assistance available as required. Word of mouth increases dramatically with these and others bringing friends and relatives to the centre.

- **1 May 2003** – A previously scheduled talk to members of the Charter Youth Group (12-17 year olds) on job opportunities within the hotel is widened, at short notice, to anyone from the community wishing to find out more about the type of employment on offer. It is estimated that some 100 local residents attend including those not conventionally linked with the SRCF – specifically noted are those already in employment and a group of some 20-30 middle aged males, employed and non-employed. As above those interested are invited to complete a standardised CV template and where suitable to be interviewed (with pre-interview assistance available as required).

- **29 April - 2 May 2003** – Over the course of the week it is estimated that some 210 individuals take part in group interviews.

- **Early May 2003** – Second interviews are conducted by Days Hotel with some of those identified from the group interview process. A limited number of those not offered employment are directed to further training (basic confidence, attitude etc) with SRCF.
o **Mid May 2003** – SRCF estimate that some 31 offers are made to local residents. The majority of offers are made within Housekeeping (the largest department) with others as Kitchen Porters, Night Porters and general Security / Car Parking Attendants. 21 of these offers are accepted although a small number (2-3) leave after a few days, reportedly having decided that the employment was not for them or was not as expected. No reason is known for the approximately 10 persons who decided not to accept offers of employment.

o **28 May 2003** – The Hotel formally opens to the public.

o **Ongoing** – Days Hotel anticipate that future recruitment will occur, as is necessary to replace turnover and gradually increase staffing in line with projected occupancy levels, on a rolling basis via newspaper and jobcentre advertisements. SRCF efforts are anticipated to focus on existing capacity building programs, linked (in the light of experiences with Days Hotel) to any known company recruitment exercises by means of specific sector-focused training and awareness events such as open days etc.
8 Value of Employer-community Interaction

Having now broadly described the employer-community interaction processes toward establishing a demand-led local area employment initiative we can now turn to the second of our aims - seeking to identify any inherent value in the processes adopted by considering rationales for participation, barriers and bridges (perceived and actual) and any costs / benefits arising.

In identifying value, the views and experiences of each of the participant groups (the employer, the local community forum and a sample of local jobseekers successful in gaining employment via the process) are examined toward establishing the full and multifaceted impact of the processes to date.

8.1 Rationale for Involvement

Each of the groups interviewed expressed a clear rationale for involvement in the process.

8.1.1 Employer

For the employer a key rationale expressed was the desire to assist local communities and their residents:

"[the employer] said at [the outset] that local people would have access to the job opportunities… [that] one of the things [they] did was build hotels in areas of high levels of unemployment to hopefully encourage the local people to take up the opportunities. So there has always been… the promise to do something with the Sandy Row Community Forum in relation to getting local people access to the job opportunities”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

While a willingness to assist locally deprived communities is an oft quoted rationale for employer involvement, in-depth discussions with employers generally reveal more business focussed benefits and this employer is no different in recognising the potential value (in both reliability and flexibility) of a workforce which not only localised but able / willing to work in a relatively low-skill / low-pay environment:
“because of the hospitality industry being 24/7 we need people round the clock and a lot of people do say 'I can't get to work' which is one of the problems that we're having at [another of our hotels] - people saying 'Oh I can't get out there...' whereas [with] this community..., everybody's at our front door or back door or side door - whichever door, so that has been completely cut out, the whole aspect of people saying 'I couldn't get into work, I missed my bus'...

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“plus the fact if you call someone in at the last minute you know that they could be here in fifteen/twenty minutes…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

Indeed even aside such notions of corporate social responsibility and initial employee numbers, other studies have noted that there are a number of wider operational benefits, particularly in the time leading up to and around the time of opening:

“there’s a fair amount of value for employers in appearing at least to be genuinely out for the good of the local communities because they might well anticipate that that's where antagonism might come from in the way of vandalism or even politically motivated damage... there’s also PR [value]... with the trend towards ethical stances, a community friendliness... would be certainly advantageous as a profile to the companies... plus that huge drive for staff and you have to think about the possibility that you won’t attract... school leavers for all your staff so you have to think about creaming off, if you like, the best of the potential staff from the surrounding disadvantaged communities... so there’s all sorts of pragmatisms there as well as genuineness... it's very hard to... try and quantify each motivation but it would certainly explain why most of those players [eventually] drop off the community map…”

South Belfast Community Worker

8.1.2 Local Community

For the local community, the rationale for involvement clearly arises from the desire to benefit from an increased accessibility to employment opportunities both in personal terms and in the wider opportunities (including general community development) that such a development may bring:
“We thought this was bringing work to the Sandy Row. I live in Sandy Row and the people of Sandy Row were delighted when they heard there was a hotel getting built to bring work to the area…”
Respondent 6 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

Particularly noted benefits were the chance to return to work; the opportunity to balance the number of hours and jobs worked and to obtain alternative employment closer to home so as to reduce travel times and commuting costs:

“I was on Income Support, I’ve a young family”
Respondent 3 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

“I gave two jobs up to come in here… I was a childminder during the day and I cleaned in the school at night.”
Respondent 2 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

“it was close to home… I’ve a younger boy… so he’d be at school during the day and starting at nine… it gives me time to get him to school, I come down to work and then I’m home for him coming home from school… just the one job [meant I could] be there at night time for the child…”
Respondent 2 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker):

“it saved me with paying fares to and from work… There was no travelling plus [the hours]… because in my [two] other jobs I was having to be there for seven o’clock in the morning.”
Respondent 1 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

“It was closer to home… better money and the hours suited”
Respondent 5 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

8.1.3 Community Organisations

For community groups such as SRCF, the rationale for involvement is linked directly to such aspirations, seeking to provide the infrastructure to maximise potential opportunities and benefits for local residents.
“Any job, no matter where you start, you could start off low and you never know where you can go… there’s people here, good people, but they’re caught in the trap of the benefits cycle… just getting a bit of help to get off that…it’s an opportunity for change for them to do better for themselves and their family and impress upon their children a work ethic…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“[the local community] couldn’t have a better opportunity there… the size of the hotel, it’s the largest in Northern Ireland, to me it was offering the most opportunity and if they [local residents] didn’t take it up someone else would so I felt that everybody needed… to at least know that the jobs were there, at least know that we were going to help them in whatever way we could to get in there…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

8.2 Lessons: Employer – Community Forum Collaboration

In considering the value of any Employer–Community Forum collaboration and lessons for future implementation it is of interest to examine the exact nature of barriers and bridges arising from particular actions or stages in the process with specific regard to increasing awareness of opportunities; recruitment; retention and the ongoing sustainability of Employer-Community Processes.

8.2.1 Pre Recruitment Phase

SRCF, as with many other community organisations, has a suite of capacity building programmes (including confidence building, CV services, interview assistance etc) intended to assist local jobseekers toward preparing for potential future job opportunities. While these can and do occur without any specific employer involvement, the decision by the employer to allow SRCF to more closely integrate these services had a series of wide ranging benefits as discussed below.

8.2.1.1 Increasing Awareness of Opportunities / Attracting Workers

Any employer, new or otherwise, would wish to have the widest possible labour pool for any given set of vacancies. Thus for the employer, involving local community organisations toward engaging local communities can play a pivotal role in effectively
widening the available labour pool:

“[the employer] were keen to accept any kind of capacity building thing that we were doing within the community…. when the recruitment really stepped up, when they needed to get the staff in… they actually took the time to come out to here, and they took the time to work in with anything that we organised within that period, they also, I suppose for their own benefit too, delegated the responsibility of allocating the interviews to us and then were prepared to work along with it…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

As is evident from the statement above, there are employer benefits not only in widening the potential labour pool but also in off-setting many of the ‘pre-interview’ stages of recruitment (i.e. promoting opportunities, fielding requests for information, arranging and scheduling interviews) thereby providing a time and cost saving for the participant employer. Potential local job applicants also benefited from SRCF participation via a more accessible, less intimidating information chain and ultimately a process more tailored toward their needs, rather than specifically those of the employer.

“I had myself and everybody out leafleting, kids… the youth that would volunteer with us and we leafleted the whole of the estate, the whole of our area initially… every single house got one, so it must have been about three thousand, probably more”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Community awareness of potential opportunities was undoubtedly increased because of SRCF’s decision to flyer the local area. The scale of this action within a closely knit community would in itself have led to some degree of word of mouth however it is likely that SRCF’s involvement created an increased optimism regarding the accessibility of these jobs.

“I heard about the jobs through the [Community] Forum… and then through [a friend]”

Respondent 2 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

“we’d heard that half of Sandy Row was going to end up working [in] it…”

Respondent 4 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)
In this scenario the employer benefits from free and valued publicity, the community from an increased awareness of opportunities and the community organisation from reinforcement of its role and the services that it can provide.

There was also however some evidence of processes beyond simple publicity, as indicated above many applicants perceived the involvement of a local community organisation as offering an increased chance of gaining employment:

“one girl… she had her NVQ in Leisure and Tourism… came along because it was on her doorstep… she said she’d seen the advert in the paper… and then she got our leaflet through the door and she thought… she’d have a bit more of a chance if she came through us…” Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“if the Community Forum hadn’t been behind it there’s no way anybody would’ve got employed in the area…” Respondent 2 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

8.2.1.2 Career Guidance / Advice

Following on from the general publicity generated from flyers and the specific involvement of SRCF comes an enhanced opportunity whereby individuals feel more able to approach the community group for further information – allowing the community organisation to combat stereotypes (e.g. by gender / sector etc) and promote the benefits of this employment opportunity, benefiting the individual toward making an informed choice in finding suitable work and also the employer who as a result is increasingly likely to receive applications from those content with the job requirements and duties:

“[the Hotel] were saying ‘Well you would come in perhaps as bar staff but we would like you to be involved in waiting the tables if required or maybe doing a bit of reception, if necessary’ - the whole concept of multi tasking, some lads in particular were saying ‘No, well if I have to do that it’s no thanks very much’… guys who were saying they wanted bar work didn’t want to be waiters or didn’t want to be working in the kitchen…” Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum
8.2.1.3 Worker Characteristics

The recruitment processes of Days Hotel mirrors what might be expected for an employer seeking to fill relatively low-skill posts in a tight labour market i.e. formal qualifications are not generally required and willingness to work, attitude and flexibility are given increased priority over even relevant experience with many positions (including the most prevalent - housekeeping) requiring no previous experience at all.

“SRCF asked ‘What are you looking for?’ and I replied ‘One - they have to have the right attitude to work. Two – they need to be flexible and Three - they need to show a bit of initiative’…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“I interviewed a lot of people and not just from this area [Sandy Row] but it did come across to me that people [from Sandy Row] had the attitude that they wanted to work and that’s one of the things I look for - attitude to work.”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

Had the employer not already been open to the value of experience and attitude, a key role for the community organisation would have been in seeking ways in which potential barriers, such as any requirement for formal qualifications could have been supplemented by alternative appraisal methods which valued experience or attitudes to work.

8.2.2 Recruitment Phase

8.2.2.1 Application process

The application process in this instance required the submission of a CV. For the employer, the use of a CV for even entry-level posts is seen as providing an opportunity for the applicant to show initiative and not to be intimidated by a standard application form requesting qualifications for instance, which they may not possess:

“[CV’s] let us see what they [the applicant] think is important… I didn’t want people to feel intimidated whenever you’ve a box [on an application form] for qualifications whenever realistically most of them don’t have any so I wanted them to put on it what they felt… it makes them sit down and think ‘What can I do?’…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel
The community organisation would however not see the use of a CV as offering the same benefits, instead considering it an increased barrier to employment over a fixed (and familiar) application form.

"a person who hasn’t been through any of our programmes here in Sandy Row wouldn’t maybe even know what a CV was … people round here don’t have a CV they can pull off the computer when they’re looking for jobs’…"

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

"when I leafleted the area they were phoning me up saying ‘What’s a CV?’, ‘How do I get one?’, ‘What do I do?’, ‘Can I not get a form?’, so to me that was a bigger barrier because I knew that anyone who read the paper on the same day as me saw the hotel advert and saw ‘CV’ [and might have been discouraged from applying]…"

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

8.2.2.2 Interview Scheduling & Advice

The decision by the employer to place SRCF in charge of scheduling and arranging interview slots was a seemingly important factor in increasing community participation. By offering advice and guidance the community organisation could encourage jobseekers to engage in an unfamiliar (particularly for those unused to seeking work) and potentially intimidating procedure toward obtaining work.

“Maybe if [the offer of an interview] had come from [the employer] you wouldn’t have had people picking up the phone and saying ‘I’ve got an interview, is there anyone that could talk me through it’…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Additionally the community organisation could initiate a proactive and seamless process from career advice / guidance through application submission to pre interview support and formal interview:

“it meant that I had the opportunity then when I was ringing people up to say ‘You’re coming for an interview… what time would suit you and could you come down tomorrow or Monday’… and if they said ‘Yeah, that would be good’, I’d say ‘Well do you want to come in and see me the day before and I can go through the interview’…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum
The interview assistance alluded to in the above quote provided not only familiarity with the interview process but an opportunity to go through questions related to the hospitality sector and specifically advice on how to bring out relevant experience. It bears reinforcing the point that relevant experience can be a critical theme within any interview process and one that the employer felt was often underplayed by many applicants, even after advice had been provided by SRCF:

“You had to go digging for it [the relevant experience], they just don’t know.”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“they don’t realise what skills they have, [one member of staff]… didn’t realise she was basically a Supervisor, she didn’t know it, it’s lack of self confidence and lack of job confidence… they’re saying ‘we’re only cleaners’…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

Indeed the problem became exacerbated where the experience had been gained outside work with a formal employer, for example via casual arrangements or even contract (agency) work

“They don’t say [on their application]… ‘I’ve done two years work in cleaning peoples houses’ for example, that’s a big one that I came across here… The only reason I found that out was actually talking to them face to face… but yet that would be the thing that would show any experience to us… I’ve two employees and one of them, that’s what she did, she did it for forty/fifty hours a week but it never came down on her application form… she had other [retail] experience on it but that was years back and for the last two years this is what she’s being doing, cleaning peoples houses, [but] for the last two years she has down on record that she wasn’t employed.”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

It is clear that while any efforts made by community organisations toward encouraging individuals to realise and highlight relevant experience will clearly pay dividends, the quotes above indicate that the work required to achieving this however should not be underestimated.
8.2.2.3 Localisation of Interview Process

Connected with the request that SRCF schedule local community interviews was the offer that these could be conducted locally within SRCF offices. It is worth noting that this offer was not driven by any great understanding of the increased benefits that this might offer the local community but rather that it offered a practical low cost option for the employer.

“We couldn’t do it on site here, the hotel hadn’t been handed over to us... this place here was still a building site... ideally I would’ve wanted to do an open day here but unfortunately just due to... health and safety...”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

Irrespective of underlying rationale this decision proved to be of immense value. SRCF initially felt that the main value of local interviews would be in reducing anxieties associated with attending interviews in an unfamiliar ‘employment edifice’, anxieties which could ultimately lead individuals to remove themselves from the process despite having submitted a successful CV:

“You know how daunting it is to be going for a job interview and having never done that kind of thing before... they might walk out of [the community centre] and say ‘Right, I’m away [to the hotel interview]’ and then just not go and lose out.”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“At the community centre] people were in an environment they know, all the daunting feelings of walking around to the hotel... just didn’t [happen]...”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

The actual value however extended far beyond this perceived value and represented a major stage in convincing the local community that the professed opportunities were real and attainable. In particular, the behaviour of key individuals (such as Human Resource Managers) are highlighted as key factors in promoting or constraining accessibility – in searching for general lessons we can highlight both actions taken and the manner in which they have been implemented, for example
“for the people who identify [with the community centre]... [Days Hotel] were prepared to come out of the office to come here and talk to 'us' and that to me was a very big thing and a lot of them [local residents] felt that…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

[It wasn't just that people were getting interviews]... it was that but the whole thing 'She's here, the HR Manager from the hotel is here doing interviews, people have got interviews, she's talking to people who have [just] applied and they're being given interviews, I don't want to miss that chance, I have to get down whether it's what I want or not and just see what's going on’…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

This 'value' of this flexibility and outreach was evident in the days surrounding the initial interview process where those scheduled for interview were increasingly turning up with friends and relatives who wished to find out more information, to fill in application forms and, if possible, to be interviewed.

“the first interview was scheduled for about 11 o'clock [but] the first person turns up with about three friends… on first day she was [scheduled to] see five or six people so out of those she probably saw [all] six say plus three friends each, so you're talking an extra eighteen people…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“[Days Hotel HR would] take the person they had scheduled for interview, while they were interviewing them the others... were filling out forms, a CV template…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

The decision by the Hotel to facilitate this increase in interview numbers (and associated workload) led to further good word of mouth, increased interest and ultimately to the meeting at the Charter Youth Group where some 100 local residents completed applications and were interviewed.

8.2.2.4 Group Interviews

In part the ability to facilitate this vast and rapid increase in numbers was due to the decision to initiate a process of group interviews. In general the group interviews and the
style in which they were conducted were seen as beneficial, with participants feeling comfortable in the company of the employer and in the presence of peers, able to help each other along and gain in confidence accordingly

“Yeah, [group interviews] definitely did help - someone else would say something and they would say ‘Oh I did that too’… especially in the younger ones…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“I think the style of interview… made a difference… it was more about getting the weight of [the persons experience]… it wasn’t a formal interview… obviously you could see the set questions coming in but it was the technique of it… it wasn’t ‘tell me about your work history’ or ‘Tell me… why you want to work in the hotel?’, it was more through conversing with them… they didn’t know they were actually being interviewed even though they [had] sat down for an interview… [Days Hotel HR] took the time… it was drawing people out of themselves and bringing that through”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

However there were also downsides to the process, with those lacking confidence less able to make their presence known:

“it ended up that they were actually group interviews… you could see that some people they used it as a comfort zone [but] they lost themselves in it so I don’t know if it is necessarily the best approach perhaps looking back”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

The weight of numbers presenting themselves for interview and joint SRCF / Employer desires to give them all an opportunity, undoubtedly led to a less than ideal situation which, with hindsight, could potentially be better handled if the exercise was to be repeated again.

“I think that bit went wrong because of the… sheer numbers that were turning up because we weren’t anticipating anything like that, we were just anticipating the twenty two that had done the CV’s,”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum
8.2.3 Post Recruitment Phase

The issue of retention and post-employment support is an interesting one given that employers are generally accustomed to recruiting mainly those with recent employment experience (typically more than two thirds of an employer’s workforce will have come directly from another employer) and community organisations are accustomed to working with local residents seeking work and not already in employment. Yet, with regard to those who have come from long periods of non-employment (including the economically inactive) the area of retention and post-employment support is a crucial consideration. This section thus deals with those issues arising following the appointment of individuals from the Sandy Row community.

8.2.3.1 Retention / Turnover

In general the employer is more than happy with what they regard as low levels of turnover to date. While it is still relatively early in the employer’s life span (they have only been established some 3-4 months) there is the perception that turnover could have been much higher:

“The main problem… that hasn’t arisen is staff turnover; I thought the staff turnover would be a lot bigger”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“In [another of our hotels]… whenever we first opened in the first month we lost forty staff… [A major competitor] in Belfast opened and lost thirteen Housekeepers on the first day… that’s just hotels in general.”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

There is a perception by the employer that at least part of the reason for this low turnover is that the Hotel has successfully managed to deliver on a promise to create local jobs for local people and that those people, content in their jobs, are not only grateful but also form the core of a body of positive word of mouth about the employer:

“a lot of it’s to do that they all know / live / work [with each other] now but I also see the fact that apparently there’s other companies… that came in and they said ‘Oh we’ll give you so many jobs’, [but]
we’ve actually done it, we’ve actually given them the jobs and at the minute there’s not many people have a bad thing… to say about us which makes us getting employees for the future a lot easier.”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

In addition, not only has the employer brought new jobs but it has, in certain areas, sought to ensure that these jobs are increasingly accessible - for example with regard to a proactive flexibility in hours associated with child care arrangements:

“[the hotel] asked everyone if they had family commitments which was a good thing because the [applicants] might not necessarily say because they want the job… so then they’d take the job and they’re really supposed to start at nine but because they have to drop their child off at nursery they’re in every morning at quarter past nine… they [as applicants] wouldn’t have said that I don’t think, had they not been asked…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“she asked me where I worked and I said ‘Well I clean offices’ and ‘What hours would I like?’, I said ‘Nine to one’ because my wee lad’s at nursery and he gets out at half one and they do accommodate me for that now, my hours are great.”

Respondent 3 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker).

“everybody else usually starts at nine, we don’t start to half nine until we get the kids away to grannies or nursery, so they were flexible that way with us which I thought was alright.”

Respondent 4 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

8.2.3.2 Adapting to New Employment

Despite currently low levels of turnover, issues associated with adapting to new employment are still important. With any new employer / employee relationship familiarisation or ‘teething’ problems can undoubtedly be expected.

Such problems however will be increasingly important for those new or returning to employment because if such problems are perceived as insurmountable, rather than something which may dissipate over time, staff turnover will likely result. Further to this, newly established companies will likely experience an increased share of such problems because they will also have management staff relatively new in post, themselves
adapting to the idiosyncrasies of a new market place and labour supply. Finally, with specific regard to the hospitality sector, the prevalence of a hierarchically ‘tall’ management structure presents an environment where staff must also become accustomed to having bosses at a number of levels. The experience within the recently established Days Hotel Belfast has thus not been dissimilar to that which might be expected from the general description above:

“I know that people aren’t used to having so many bosses, it’s a general rule - not many people get as many bosses as they do in a hotel, you’ve Supervisors, then you’ve Managers, then you’ve Assistant Managers and then you have your General Managers and then you’ve a Support Team which is their Head Office …unfortunately at the start the Management Team… had other things on their minds trying to get the hotel full… one person was telling them [the staff] one thing and then somebody else was telling them another…”
Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“you don’t know who’s your boss and who’s not your boss”
Respondent 6 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

“It’s sort of settled down a wee bit now…”
Respondent 2 (Sandy Row Resident and Days Hotel Worker)

Aside from initial management issues there have been other problems that, while possibly short-term teething problems, are still ongoing. More importantly while they could be viewed as minor they nonetheless have a particular impact on those in low-paid weekly employment, roles typical of those offered by the hotel and taken by Sandy Row residents. For example, problems with incorrect wages and missing payslips (meaning that workers on low incomes are unaware of the amount they have been paid and thus have available to spend on necessities) are seemingly common. Additional to this is a lack of predictability regarding the number of hours that the employer will require them to work, leading to insecurity regarding the viability of such employment – particularly when compared to the reliability of benefits. The impacts of such problems are clear with workers indicating that, for the moment at least, the teething troubles represent a significant barrier to their ability to recommend the employer to friends or relatives.
“[Interviewer: Would you still recommend working here to people?]  
Respondent 4: No.  
Respondent 5: No… Because of the way it’s been handled, there’s people asking me about jobs going in here…  
Respondent 4: And you just say ‘No’… I just don’t think they know what they’re doing themselves in here half the time.  
Respondent 5: Yeah, it’s very disorganised.  
[Interviewer: So if they were just more predictable, if you’d a good idea they wouldn’t reduce people’s hours or lay them off?]  
Respondent 4: On aye I would definitely recommend it.”

Indeed, if such problems are allowed to persist by management they could lead not only to increased turnover but also to a more widespread negative word of mouth, potentially diminishing much of the good work undertaken as a result of the Employer-Community interaction.

8.2.3.3 Staff Promotions

It is not uncommon for new organisations who have recruited significant numbers to wish to promote the best of those initial recruits to higher supervisory positions. Experience with other new start-ups has shown that workers recognise this and often join such companies in the explicit hope that they can benefit from such processes and obtain rapid promotion.

However, with regard to the recruitment of those from Sandy Row the opposite has been observed with the employer wishing to promote some of those successful in obtaining employment but unable to convince them to accept higher positions.

“I thought that we would’ve got a lot of people who wanted to develop, we’re giving them the opportunity of a job and there’s people that just don’t want to develop… we’ve offered Supervisor positions to two people and they won’t take it up even though we’re showing by offering them the position how much we believe in them.”  
Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

It would seem that this phenomenon is a continuation of the lack of personal and job confidence (outlined earlier) that led individuals to either under-estimate the work relevant experience or wealth of roles that they may have successfully undertaken via previous employment or community / family activities.
“People don’t want responsibility of Supervisors which we have found here already…
[Interviewer: because it comes down to self confidence again?]…
Definitely, definitely without doubt…”
Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

The Hotel, in need of staff to fulﬁl those roles have however adopted a novel approach in dealing with the issue

‘within the first two weeks we knew that she would be good enough to be a Supervisor but she’s turned it ﬂat down, she doesn’t want to do it so what we’re doing now is we’re making her a Trainer, bringing her up that way… so if we get a new start we’ll put them with her for the ﬁrst couple of weeks so they can develop that way, so [eventually] she’ll say ‘I train all the staff here’…”
Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

“we’re still waiting… I haven’t ﬁlled those positions, just in case they might…”
Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

8.2.3.4 Post Employment Support

The issues outlined above point to the potential value that some form of Post Employment Support could perhaps provide. We are fortunate in this regard that, despite the absence of any formal mechanism between employees and the employer and/or community group, workers have had informal contact with SRCF who have provided some form of assistance in grounding fears and providing context regarding employment matters and conditions.

“I don’t mind them coming in and talking… you can give them advice and information in the way things work… where they might not be able to ask that question over there but [even] explaining how a pay role system works is enough sometimes…”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“the opening of a hotel there’s nothing like it… and I’ve said to them all ‘Your probably thinking you’re walking… into [a hotel] that’s been established for… years, has the procedures and the systems all in place and you’re walking in to do a housekeeping job… just slotting
in where everything’s already established whereas over there you are actually being given the opportunity to get in and set it up’…”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“people who are long term unemployed and people who have maybe never had a job or who are just coming out of school it’s a lot to do with… their attitude… how to present yourself… and what will be happening… once you’re in a job, what then is expected of you… taking people through Contracts, the girls from the hotel… hadn’t seen a Contract [before]”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Similarly, for those not successful in gaining employment a degree of support has been provided to certain individuals with regard to basic skills training and potential re-application.

“it would be a case of saying ‘If you’re committed, if you really want the job in the hotel, whatever, I’ll help you do whatever it takes’ now I did actually say that to the two girls who were let go, [one] is now back in the hotel, the other one isn’t but she’s not been back to us”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“[we worked on] confidence in herself really and taking that chance again on the hotel, she didn’t particularly want to go back to the hotel… Because they’d turned her down but it was just saying ‘Right, just go with it and just have the confidence and stick up for yourself’ … she [also] had a lot of support from the rest of the women because they were already in.”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

The relative success of these tentative efforts serves as an example for how such support could be widened and more explicitly developed, a consideration that is returned to later with regard to lessons learnt from other employers.

8.2.4 Costs / Benefits and Future Sustainability

Having examined the value of specific actions across pre and post recruitment processes, this section now summarises overarching costs and benefits with a view to ensuring an ongoing sustainability of Employer-Community outreach processes.
8.2.4.1 Costs of Involvement

There have undoubtedly been a number of costs associated with the Employer-Community interaction approach.

For the employer, such an approach is front-loaded with perceived and actual costs. Perceptual costs accrue with regard to presumed difficulties of working with external partners – including disadvantaged communities, particularly where skill levels may not be sufficient or only being able to offer a limited number of jobs may lead to local resentment (and subsequent negative word of mouth) from those unable to obtain them. In this case study however the perceived cost / risk has however been rewarded by the recruitment of staff into otherwise hard to fill vacancies:

“It was a big risk for us to take [but] all of our Housekeeping Department at the moment, bar three, are from the Sandy Row area”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

Actual costs accrue largely in management time and effort over and above that normally required when advertising posts via ‘conventional’ methods such as newspapers or job centres. Similarly, costs may accrue with regard to supplemental in work training as those not coming directly from other formal employment may have lower skill levels, less relevant experience or be less work ready:

“a disadvantage would be they’re unskilled. But then that’s hospitality in general... Generally the others [non SRCF sourced applicants] that are applying have experience, not just experience in the hospitality industry but experience working, they can actually put on record ‘I worked in such and such a place’...”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

This problem is perhaps however less of an issue for the hospitality industry with the Days Hotel indicating that they are more accustomed to dealing with lower skilled applicants than other sectors might be:
For community organisations, while the work with potential job seekers mirrors that of conventional capacity building programmes, increased costs accrue from the extra administration and workload in liaising with the participant employer and through additional activities such as promoting opportunities / increasing awareness within the local community (e.g. via flyering) and scheduling / facilitating interviews and associated processes. An additional but important cost for the community organisation is the potential damage that could be done to the organisation’s reputation from becoming involved with an employer who subsequently turned out to be less than ideal:

“For this approach is a good thing but once you’re seen as responsible for getting people into the jobs you’re also responsible for the headaches, I mean there’s not a day goes past really if there’s been a problem that I don’t know about it… people think that we employ them in the hotel and people think that we’re the ones who gave them the jobs…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

For residents of the local community, the costs largely mirror those of any conventional recruitment opportunity – the time to gather information, prepare for interview and the risk of obtaining and accepting employment which if less than ideal may lead to problems with regard to reverting to benefits or previous employment / wages. It is largely the case however that the Employer-Community interaction process serves to reduce or remove many of these potential costs.

8.2.4.2 Benefits of Involvement

Balancing the above costs are a number of benefits which, as has been illustrated earlier, are often multi-layered – for example with regard to the benefits of SRF involvement:
“It was very beneficial to the people of the area because they didn’t have to go so far as to take that step on their own, they were coming to somewhere that was local, [that]… they were familiar with so it wasn’t as scary and by them coming in here it was almost like their first foot in the door… [Days Hotel also] seemed to accept [SRCF involvement] as almost a reference for the people… because we were saying ‘We have these people, they’ve done this [courses] with us and we’re putting them forward to you.’”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

For the employer, they are not only provided with a cost-effective means of securing workers who because of their proximity and skill levels have the potential to exhibit increased reliability, suitability and flexibility over those living further away, more highly qualified and / or from previous employment. Further to this, close engagement and relationship building with local communities may itself serve to increase retention and possibly open up potential to expand recruitment to other local sites within the group:

“They’re not willing to travel to [very distant hotels] no, but they are to [relatively nearby sites], not everybody is, but there are some people [who will now consider it]…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

For the community, benefits accrue not only in terms of the opportunities available to individuals as outlined in previous sections but also from an increased buoyancy for the whole community associated with the general increase in employment from a situation where persistent high local unemployment gave rise to little hope of achievement:

“because there is so much unemployment and they don’t actually see a lot of people going out to work.”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“people thought… ‘Oh I’ll never get a job, nothing will come of it’…”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Importantly, the scale of the achievement relative to this baseline and what had previously been thought possible should not be under-estimated:
“Of course we wanted people to come in for the jobs but really all we wanted was for people to get an interview, get their foot in, if we’d got one job out of this it would’ve been a success, if one person initially was employed that would’ve been a great achievement…
[Interviewer: because it validates the service that you can provide… and that if people go through these processes they can access employment?]
Yes and that if you take the chance it can happen… one person really was all we were hoping [for]… the fact that we got… twenty-two people coming in to do CV’s with us was remarkable… it was focused, they knew that it was for a specific [job]…”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

However such changes are neither immediate nor permanent and sustained efforts are and will be required to ensure a continuation of such change:

“Even though the interviews were being set up, through all the stages… people aware of what I was doing… still… kept saying to me ‘Okay, you’ve got to this stage, nothing is going to come of what you’re doing now, [then]… ‘Alright you’ve put twenty two CV’s in but that’s it,… and then ‘Alright twenty two people have got interviews but none of them are going to get a job’…”
Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

To the individuals who gained work the value of the process and particularly of the involvement of the SRCF is clear from the following excerpt:

“Respondent 3: “[the employment] is good for the community, employing people from the community and it’s good to know that they’re [working] there.  
Respondent 1: There’s not many opportunities for people round here in our area…  
Respondent 3: No, not round here… And only for the Forum [it wouldn’t have happened], I think it’s great.  
Respondent 1: And it gives us a bit of hope too, if you see new things starting.  
Respondent 3: And because… I’ll tell you neighbours of mine… stopped me the other day, she says ‘That’s great that they are employing people from this area’…”

For the participant community organisation additional benefits also accrue from a successful process – principally from validation of how such services can directly assist
people into employment but also from the increased exposure that such widespread word of mouth can attain:

“There was a lot [of interest], people were stopping us in the street…” Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

“Of the twenty two… [only] 50% had been through a [SRCF] programme… I actually [met] a lot of people that I didn’t know because they don’t necessarily come into [the centre]…” Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Finally, the experience of working closely with an employer and insights arising from the Employer-Community process can lead to new and refined ways of working toward increasing the number of locally accessible employment opportunities:

“An employer tie-in… definitely seems… the way… now I always look in the paper to see if there are any other new business, jobs coming up in the area that we could do this kind of thing again… just pick out the job adverts that are in and around the locality and focus on obviously trying to engage the employer but even just doing the leaflets…” Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

8.2.4.3 Continued Sustainability

In considering how such costs can be minimised, benefits improved and more importantly the process sustained, there are a number of key points worth highlighting:

In the context of an employer–community interaction process it should be recognised that the opportunity for getting the greatest number of local residents into specific employment will likely coincide with the time of greatest recruitment by the participant employer, and that this will most likely occur exclusively when the employer establishes or undergoes rapid planned expansion. The implication here is that, as the employer moves from an establishment / expansion phase into a consolidation phase that direct employment opportunities will diminish to levels generally commensurate with the replenishment of turnover.
Further compounding this reduction in actual opportunities is a potential decrease in awareness (particularly for those reliant on community centre assistance into work) of any remaining ongoing opportunities as the intensive interaction between employer and community organisation reduces over time (as the costs of participation increasingly outweigh the recruitment benefits)

“Now we only recruit through the Job Centre in the area… It’s general word of mouth round here… I haven’t had direct dealings with SRCF since the hotel has opened… because we’ve only taken on an extra four staff…”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

In this context it is perhaps not surprising that the perception develops that “most of those players [eventually] drop off the community map” (South Belfast Community Worker). If sustained community benefits are however to be encouraged and maximised it is important that from the outset community organisations work to minimise possible feelings of ‘desertion’ by educating ALL participant groups about the type, range and duration of benefits associated with any Employer-Community interaction. Additionally it is suggestive that community organisations should seek to develop new ways of working with employers beyond the period of initial recruitment, encouragingly it appears that this is something SRCF has begun to consider.

“I would hope that we… try and encourage people to take up other opportunities and if we could run our capacity building programmes, confidence building, personal development plus health & safety… then actually put people in an employment situation… even if it’s just taken for one session out of a personal development course people go over to the hotel and they see around it and they see what happens in reception and they see what happens in the kitchen and they see what happens in the bar and what happens in housekeeping… because some people might not ever have thought that working in a hotel was necessarily for them but… having [occasional] access… to the hotel, …they might actually say ‘Oh it would be great…’ because look at all the hotels around us…”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Thus in addition to seeking out new employers with whom the initial process could be replicated, a key agenda could be to secure extended access to participant employers and their staff / premises on an occasional basis, thus reducing the ‘cost’ to the
employer while retaining the community benefits and participation levels of employer-linked training programs.

“The take up of things is notoriously low in this area but I hope that… we will see dividends as there is now word of mouth and people should see that the programmes, because they involve an employer, could lead to employment”

Community Worker, Sandy Row Community Forum

Events such as open days will still retain value for the employer with regard to sustained community relations and general PR as well as retaining the profile of the employer with respect to replacing natural turnover and facilitating potential future expansions.

“Ideally I would like to do an open day, talking to a few members of management, talking to a few members of staff, I’d like to bring staff from other hotels that’s with the company, the young people that have come up through the ranks and young people who have just started… just let them see what we offer”

Human Resources Manager, Days Hotel

The exact nature of any such sustained employability effort would undoubtedly require refinement over time but is an area in which the local employability working group, mentioned at the outset of this report, could play a key role in providing continuity and advice for both those seeking work and those providing it. Overall the advantage of such an approach would see the combination of expertise and experience from within the local community with that from organisations such as SBPB, GEMS, DEL’s Employment Service as well as neighbouring communities to establish a more fully integrated service, designed from the ground up to balance local needs and conditions with assistance and up-to-date information on available government programmes and community resources. The involvement of neighbouring communities and/or those representing the range of equality groupings would not only further inform the working of the group but would promote employment / training opportunities to a fuller range of individuals / groups.

For local jobseekers, be they from education, training, non-employment or employment, the sustainability (and hence availability) of such a process is paramount. Not only would the opportunity of direct access to a ‘real’ job provide added incentive to participate
in training schemes but where tightly integrated with community assistance, the seamless nature of such processes means that participants can be guided from initial advice, though capacity building programmes, toward open days, job application and interview assistance with those successful in obtaining employment benefiting from post-employment support, and with those not successful benefiting from support and advice regarding future opportunities and associated training.

For the employer, a single point of contact providing a range of highly tailored and proven advice regarding a range of business benefits could help persuade them to become involved and in time to recommend such processes to others. For community organisations, the effectiveness of their efforts are increased by the involvement of partner organisations who not only provide increased capacity where required, but who also further inform and refine efforts via the assimilation of shared lessons and discussions.

8.3 Lessons: Other Studies

This section seeks to contextualise the work undertaken via the Sandy Row Community Forum – Days Hotel Belfast Employability Initiative by summarising work that the author has undertaken with another large, Belfast based, service-sector employer (hereafter Employer X) who also engaged in a community outreach process. Where similar experiences have been encountered lessons can be reinforced and further validated while differences may point to areas for further work or indeed new lessons to be incorporated into any subsequent Employer-Community outreach procedures. It is important to note however that this comparison is limited (because of the scope of the work with the previous employer) to a consideration of actions taken with regard to recruitment and post-recruitment support and not with events leading to the establishment or development of the process itself.

A notion often promoted by local community organisations is the need for a ‘sustained momentum’ toward ensuring a permanent improvement in an individual’s employability – a sustained effort is seen as pivotal toward convincing the disenfranchised individual to invest in the process – to persuade them that they are not just completing another
application and that there is a real, achievable and immediate job at the end of a finite process.

The actions of employers have an important role to play in facilitating a flexible and sustained approach and it is in this context that the following measures are introduced and discussed. The processes adopted as part of the Employer X's outreach can neatly be summarised into General Accessibility Measures (intended to assist all applicants) and Targeted Accessibility Measures (intended to widen recruitment and assist a broader range of applicants into employment).

8.3.1 General Accessibility Measures

**Flexibility** - Some of those seeking work, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, may have very specific conditions under which they may be able to take work – pay, conditions, hours etc. As with Days Hotel, Employer X has identified this as an area where flexibility on their behalf could promote increased access to certain groups (e.g. working parents) and have implemented or are considering a number of processes.

Employer X has however gone further and developed this flexible approach to include a choice of possible start dates, hours and working patterns or indeed in the option to be placed on a waiting list until a suitable working pattern is available. Training is also matched to the working patterns required by the individual with evening training sessions run specifically in the event of a recruitment drive targeted at evening shift workers.

**Qualification / Entrance Requirements** – At the outset of recruitment Employer X undertook a highly tailored review of skills needs and recruitment and selection procedures. As with Days Hotel they concluded that they do not require a minimum level of qualifications for customer service assistants. Additionally, and again as with Days Hotel, previous experience within the industry was another seemingly likely pre-requisite that has been dispensed with. In the case of Employer X job advertisements were redesigned to make
applicants aware of this:

"It's not about saying I've got to have [relevant or work-based] experience, the majority of people that work here don't have either… and it doesn't have to be in work even but just life experiences of dealing with people, working in an environment where they've had to handle change… where they've had to work with each other… and this stuff can come from college experience, life experience, home experience…”

(Employer X, Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

To ascertain employee suitability in the absence of these relatively common indicators, Employer X’s interview process was tailored around two key areas – a standard aptitude test to evaluate literacy, numeracy and an ability to solve logical problems (important to the jobs on offer) and a ‘behavioural competency interview’ where interviewees were walked through problem solving scenarios and encouraged to retell relevant life experiences (a process mirrored by Days Hotel with regard to assisting individuals to identify work relevant experiences). Unlike qualifications, these ‘measures’ were seen as relating directly to the skills needed to operate successfully in Employer X’s specific business environment.

Enhanced Recruitment Packs – Employer X took an innovative step to assist those applicants with less recent in-work experience. Recruitment packs were expanded to include a help sheet on completing the application form, preparing for interviews and undertaking aptitude tests. Additionally non-employed applicants were advised of the importance of including non-employment related experiences as an alternative to in-work experience - again representing an effort to remove barriers for those seeking work.

Clearly there are elements in all of the above that reinforce the actions of Days Hotel and the benefits available to employers. There are also additional areas and ways in which the work undertaken by Days Hotel can be expanded and refined for use with other employers. The benefits of these measures to jobseekers are clear – increased employer flexibility tailored to the needs of those moving into (new) employment, and the reduction of entrance requirements such as formal qualifications and previous
experience, serve to widen the range of vacancies to which an individual may apply. Additionally, the positive attitude of the employer in providing help sheets with job application forms and in assisting individuals during interviews to identify relevant life experiences undoubtedly assisted applicants toward obtaining employment.

8.3.2 Targeted Accessibility Measures

Moving from general measures intended to assist all groups into employment we can now consider those actions intended to widen recruitment and encourage a broader range of individuals into employment.

For employers, particularly those operating in tight labour markets, benefits clearly exist in any widening of the available labour pool and hence there can be a strong desire to explore and actively engage diverse pools of labour - returners, those with few or no qualifications, older workers, disabled workers, the unemployed or those with minimal work experience.

“as far as recruitment’s concerned, it’s about trying to just sort of get people to think again… to perhaps prompt somebody to look twice and to think ‘That could be me… if they can do it, I can do it.’”

(Employer X, Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

As with Days Hotel a key factor in Employer X’s ability to achieve this desire was the assistance of a local community forum (involving the employer, a range of local community groups, partnership boards and JobCentre staff). The Forum met to discuss accessibility measures and crucially how local jobseekers and the unemployed / returners could be afforded better access to employment within Employer X. In both processes (Days Hotel and Employer X) the involvement of an Employer-Community interaction process has been pivotal in encouraging local residents to consider and apply for work.

Additionally, the process resulted in the establishment of a number of important processes that are summarised below:
Open Days – In addition to the willingness of Employer X to visit the local community and engage with local residents (a factor noted as highly important with regard to the Days Hotel experience) potential employees from local communities were taken by their local community representatives to visit Employer X and view the working environment for themselves. Employees showcasing the work environment were carefully selected to come from a range of diverse backgrounds themselves - older workers, from unemployment, returnees etc – thereby illustrating how they were able to overcome similar barriers to gain employment at the site. JobCentre and Benefits Office staff were available to provide multi-faceted advice on benefits and moving back into employment. Overall, individuals benefit from direct experience of likely working conditions and the encouragement of workers while the employer benefits from both widening their labour supply and in receiving applications from individuals who now have an understanding of the work involved and therefore should be less likely to form part of any short term turnover. The above example could perhaps be used to inform future open days proposed by Days Hotel / SRCF.

Sequencing of Employment Drives with training programmes - This is one area in which community organisations felt there was much progress to be made toward maintaining ‘momentum’ for jobseekers i.e. if training programmes could be sequenced with employment drives so as to remove any intervening periods of non-activity then there was a significantly higher chance of getting non-employed jobseekers into the types of work for which they were being trained. Jobseekers would thus be provided with a direct employment goal (similar to Bridge to Employment) and intervening inactivity or non-optimal types of employment could be avoided (both which may serve to disenchant the individual and lead to a possible withdrawal from the labour market). This approach mirrors that originally envisaged by SRCF in association with Days Hotel, which unfortunately did not occur as a result of an unfortunate lack of co-ordination in the early stages of interaction. None-the-less it does serve to further reinforce the importance of such co-ordination and the importance of encouraging such efforts in the future.
Signposting for unsuccessful applicants – An important process arising from the work with Employer X was that of ‘signposting’ i.e. should an applicant be unsuccessful the employer would use the ‘rejection’ letter to not only thank the individual for their application but to provide pointers on how to perform better in the future (via the standard help sheets on application forms, aptitude testing or interview skills) and crucially to provide immediate alternatives for the jobseeker (a.k.a. ‘signposting’) - not only is the jobseeker invited to apply again at the next recruitment drive but is also given information regarding relevant community / government agencies and ongoing schemes for which they may be eligible.

“...it gave me a good impression of them …they’re looking for staff and they’re willing to let you know where you went wrong and they’re giving you a chance to reapply… nobody else ever did that.”

(Employer X: Worker C).

As with the sequenced training efforts (outlined above) the intent here is to capitalise on and maintain any momentum and to provide an accessible ‘next step’ for those seeking work. Analogous to the Post-Employment Support provided by SRCF, this area of ‘Post- Rejection Support’ is clearly one that could be developed and added to any future undertakings by SRCF or similar organisations.

Employment Initiatives – Employer X was a keen advocate of schemes such as GEMS and Bridge to Employment⁴.

“We’ve been really fortunate that we’ve been able to work very closely with the T&EA and the Bridge Schemes and have had some fantastic results and have got some very, very, very good people here through that route…”

(Employer X, Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

The provision provided by SRCF would be similar in broad scope and intention to these schemes. Similar to that noted by Days Hotel, Employer X regarded

⁴ Bridge to Employment is a government programme providing the unemployed with employer linked customised and, if successful, a direct offer of employment.
participation in such schemes as providing the following benefits:

- Providing a source of pre-screened workers for whom training is not only tailored to company needs but is also subsidised.
- Because such schemes largely target the non-employed, effectively bypassing those already in employment, they reduce within sector turnover, thereby growing and strengthening the sector as a whole.
- As having a workforce balancing effect in that they provide access to a wider range of social groups than normally associated with the sector – be it on qualifications, gender, age, location or community background.

8.3.3 Value of Accessibility Measures

Again, the work with Employer X serves to reinforce and further validate the value attributed to the outreach by SRCF.

Individual jobseekers - particularly those previously non-employed - clearly benefited from the Employer X’s reassessment of skills needs and the outreach measures designed to improve access. For the employer, benefits were identified in improved perceptions by local jobseekers and in a more varied and stable workforce. Certainly interviews with workers would seem to support this with those recruited via outreach seemingly more willing to stay with the employer for an extended period of time:

“I’m happy here… I’m hoping to stay for as long as possible… the working conditions are excellent… I don’t think I’ll be moving…”
(Employer X, Bridge to Employment Recruit).

“The people from the outreach mechanisms are in many cases some of the most loyal people we have…”
(Employer X, Operations Manager, May 2002)

For the communities adjacent to Employer X there were clear and similar benefits to be accrued from engaging employers and encouraging outreach measures – particularly with regard to how more accessible and attainable employment opportunities were slowly changing community attitudes toward seeking work:
“there has been an upturn in employment in the area … increased opportunities on the doorstep that have allowed people to go into the service industries… there’s more of a momentum about employment in the area… I’ve noticed that several of the young men in the community who were doing informal, casual work are now starting to ask us if it’s viable that they could get into [the employer], because they’ve seen some people get in… and then there’s the whole knock on about improved esteem and identity…”

(Community Development Worker, South Belfast)

8.3.4 Summary

The work with Employer X serves to reinforce the work between SRCF and Days Hotel by further highlighting many of the ways in which community interaction can assist an employer to play a significant role in improving ‘employability’ - for example by making itself and the type of employment it offers, not only more attractive but also increasingly accessible by embarking on a process of sustained outreach and reviewing the skills and aptitudes necessary to undertake the jobs in question, removing qualification barriers where appropriate. In addition to reinforcing the lessons learned from the Days Hotel - SRCF interaction, Employer X has also undertaken work (particularly in 'signposting' and open days) that could inform future work by SRCF or similar organisations.
9 Recommendations

This section seeks to draw on the major lessons identified in the report to provide a series of short recommendations of utility in the future implementation of any Employer – Community Interaction process.

9.1 General Approach

- Establish a local employability-working group, to provide continuity, resources, expertise and a single point of contact for those seeking work and those providing it.

- Seek to ensure that the above group is representative of not only local and government service providers but also neighbouring communities and groups who represent and could encourage increased participation from the full range of individuals / groups represented within Northern Ireland society.

- For the employer, recognise that decision makers exist within the business at different levels (e.g. from Chief Executive through to Human Resources Manager) and that each may be responsive to differing arguments toward participation (e.g. from enhanced corporate profile through to reduced turnover),

- Recognise that there are considerable business benefits to the employer from involvement, and that illustrating these will potentially do more to persuade the employer to participate than any notions of corporate social responsibility. Endeavour to promote these alongside desirable social outcomes e.g.
  - Favourable PR at various stages (employer willing to work / is working / has worked to assist local non-employed into work)
  - Increased profile will increase number of applicants generally
  - Targeting local community / groups will further widen labour supply
  - Subsequent word of mouth, should further increase labour supply (marketing becomes organic, self sustaining)
  - Potential Workforce Balancing effect (gender, age, religion etc)
  - Decreased vandalism during construction phase (if applicable)
Increased reliability (time / attendance) / Decreased turnover (loyalty)

Local staff because of their proximity can display increased reliability, flexibility, punctuality, (resulting for example from decreased transport problems particularly with regard to shift work)

The involvement of a community organisation can reduce much of the overhead required to recruit local applicants (by assisting with promotion, screening, and interview assistance etc)

9.2 Pre Recruitment Phase

Be specific about aims and intentions from the perspective of both employer and community organisation (it may be useful to obtain high and low estimates of potential initial job numbers toward allocating resources).

Schedule key dates with regard to recruitment. Capacity building etc should then be sequenced accordingly and if possible directly linked with planned recruitment.

Be proactive and begin discussions with employer as early as possible and keep regular (but unobtrusive) contact. Do not assume that the employer will be able to keep you informed, particularly during times of intensive recruitment and / or change.

Encourage employers to visit a range of community organisations as an important first step in engaging key local representatives, building momentum and promoting word of mouth regarding potential opportunities.

Discuss entry requirements toward identifying skills and qualifications required by employers and needed by applicants to qualify for interview and job offer. Establish the extent to which formal qualifications are really necessary for the job and look to establish if the employer might be open to considering alternatives.

Discuss the method of application (e.g. CV versus Application Form) seeking to minimise any barriers to participation and consider providing supplemental information to all applicants such as help sheets on completing applications forms and job descriptions for all jobs inc. entry-level posts.
o Develop a process by which a local community organisation can deal with queries regarding potential opportunities and deal with requests for further information / applications forms etc.

9.3 Recruitment Phase

o Recognise the value of an integrated Employer-Community approach in persuading individuals to participate – for example the employer can capitalise on community credentials toward gaining a wider labour pool.

o Recognise the value of personal communication between the employer and local residents in persuading potential applicants that new opportunities may in fact be real AND achievable.

o Recognise the value of providing information in support of a move into employment – for example information on the nature of employment available, flexibility in shifts, wages, commensurate family tax credits, personal / community development.

o Encourage events such as community visits, open days and local presentations to achieve the above.

o Recognise the value of linking with partner organisations such as neighbouring communities, GEMS and the employment service to provide resources, share expertise, widen the potential impact of any interaction and to provide a single point of contact to which the employer can direct questions or refer queries.

o Make employer aware of government / community organised courses that could be independently scheduled in the run up to planned employment opportunities (e.g. Bridge to Employment, CV services, interview skills). Additionally, recognise that participation in such courses may itself increase as a result of them being directly linked to the employment opportunity.

o Recognise the value of direct interaction with the community / local residents promoting the support available in making an employment application (e.g. flyering with information on advice available and capacity building courses). Consider asking the employer to subsidise the cost of these (and possibly other) outreach efforts as a form of low cost advertising and community engagement.
o Promote the value of delegating the interview scheduling process from employer to community organisation. The employer benefits from a reduced overhead with candidates better prepared for interview and employment. Local jobseekers benefit from advice and assistance toward their interview – particularly with regard to identifying relevant skills and experience.

o Promote the value of locally held interviews. In support of the above, interviews held within the community (because of an increased social and spatial accessibility) may benefit from a higher response rate and increased word of mouth re: employer commitment.

9.4 Post Recruitment Phase

9.4.1 For those successful in recruitment exercise

o To assist those offered employment in their decision to accept, provide further specific advice on employment related benefits, family tax credit etc.

o For those accepting work (particularly those previously non-employed) provide advice on payroll, contracts, punctuality, flexibility, benefits of employment etc.

o Initiate an informal information network whereby employees can obtain advice / assistance with any teething or adjustment problems. Feed back to employer as necessary regarding how small changes / improvements might make considerable differences to those new to work (and particularly those in low skill / low pay employment).

o Utilise the informal information network to continue capacity building with regard to work relevant skills and confidence building toward promotion opportunities etc.

o Obtain feedback from successful applicants regarding if / how the Employer-Community interaction processes could be improved. Use this information to improve / promote future Employer-Community interaction measures.

9.4.2 For those unsuccessful in recruitment exercise

o Initiate a series of employer facilitated signposting measures, providing information on alternative avenues (option to reapply, other employment,
community assistance, government training etc) helping to ensure those interested in employment opportunities remain engaged with the labour market.

- Provide standardised feedback and assistance (help sheets) regarding application / interview process to both encourage and improve future applications.

- Obtain feedback from unsuccessful applicants regarding if / how the Employer-Community interaction processes could be improved. Use this information to improve / promote future Employer-Community interaction measures.

9.4.3 For the Employer-community

- Initiate mechanisms to establish a sustained employability effort beyond the initial recruitment phase – for example occasional open days or employer visits as a minority component of community organised capacity building measures.

- Recognise that events such as occasional open days will maintain value for the employer with regard to sustained community relations and publicity as well as for the community in the promotion of capacity building programmes.

- Obtain feedback from the employer on benefits achieved (including an assessment of turnover) and if / how the process could be improved. Use this information to improve / promote future Employer-Community interaction measures.
10 Appendix 1 – Employer Interview Themes

- How circumstances and outcomes have changed through participation
- Key factors influencing that change
- How such processes might be replicated/improved with respect to future programmes.

Background
- Time with group/other relevant roles
- Company (similar hotels/schemes)
- Outset: Rationale for becoming involved?
- Perceived Advantages/Obstacles of involvement

Process of becoming involved.

Interaction with:
- Employer
- Community Agencies
- Local Jobseekers

Reflection: Problems
- Expected but haven't arisen
- Expected and have arisen
- Unexpected and have arisen

Reflection: Benefits
- Expected but haven't arisen
- Expected and have arisen
- Unexpected and have arisen

Reflection: Value of Process
- Key Lessons Learnt?

Advice
- To other employers
- To community agencies
- To unemployed jobseekers.
11 Appendix 2 – Employee Interview Themes

Sandy Row Community Forum (SRCF) have asked me to come along and talk to you about how you felt their work with the Days Hotel helped you to get into a job. By talking to you we hope to learn what worked and what didn’t work so that we can try and help other people into work. Everything you say is confidential and your name will not be attached to any comments you make.

To understand this I would like to talk to you about your situation

- Before you applied for work with Days Hotel,
- What you thought were the good and bad points about the relationship between the Community Forum and the Days Hotel, and
- How the process / getting a job with the hotel has changed things for you.

Things I’d Like to Talk About

- Good / Bad Points about getting a job through the Community Forum / Days Hotel
- What sticks in your mind as something you thought was a help or not?
- Why does it stick in your mind? (how could it have been changed for better / worse)

How did you end up applying for your job?

- How did you hear about the job?
- How did you apply?
- How did the interview go?
- What help did you get and was it useful?
- What did you think of the process / could it be better or worse?

What were you doing before you applied for your job with Days Hotel?

- Unemployed (JSA)
- Looking after Family / Home
- Not in a job but doing a little casual work
- Was anyone else in your house working?
- Had you applied for any other jobs recently? How did that go?

How have things changed for you now you have a job with Days Hotel?

- Have you had any problems getting used to working in the hotel?
- Changes in life in general / at home
- Would you recommend the hotel to others? Has anybody taken your advice?
12 Appendix 3 - Community Interview Themes

- How circumstances and outcomes have changed through participation
- Key factors influencing that change
- How such processes might be replicated / improved with respect to future programmes.

- Outset: Rationale for becoming involved?
  - Perceived Advantages / Obstacles of involvement

- Process of becoming involved. Interaction with:
  - Employer
  - Partner Agencies
  - Local Jobseekers

- Reflection: Problems
  - Expected but haven’t arisen
  - Expected and have arisen
  - Unexpected and have arisen

- Reflection: Benefits
  - Expected but haven’t arisen
  - Expected and have arisen
  - Unexpected and have arisen

- Reflection: Value of Process
  - Key Lessons Learnt?
  - Advice
    - To other employers
    - To community agencies
    - To unemployed jobseekers
A Case Study in Successful Employability

13 Appendix 4 – SRCF Flyer

SANDY ROW COMMUNITY FORUM
WORKING TOGETHER FOR OUR COMMUNITY

JOB OPPORTUNITIES AT NEW HOTEL ON SANDY ROW

DAYS HOTEL
40 Hope Street, Belfast
The New City Centre 244 Bedroom Days Hotel will be Belfast’s Largest Hotel
If you possess spark and personality and would like to work in a dynamic and exciting environment, apply immediately. Full and Part Time Opportunities Exist:

- Deputy General Manager
- Rooms Manager
- Front Office Manager
- Restaurant Manager
- Night Manager
- Night Porter
- Hotel Accountant (would suit part qualified)
- Security
- Receptionists
- Reservations Supervisor
- Reservations
- Catering Supervisors (All grades)
- Catering Assistants
- Breakfast Cook
- Rooms Supervisors
- Room Attendants
- Restaurant Supervisor
- Waiting Staff
- Bar Supervisor
- Bar Staff
- Bar Floor Staff
- Hygiene Assistants

Please apply by sending C.V. to Tricia McCloskey
Andras House 60 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7BB
Telephone 028 90875791
E: tricia.mccloskey@dayshotelbelfast.com
Closing Date 4th April 2003
Lincon centre Belfast Ltd is an Equal Opportunities Employer

FOR INFO & ADVICE IN MAKING AN APPLICATION CONTACT GLENDA
90238446
14 Appendix 5 – Map of Days Hotel & Sandy Row Area

Sandy Row Area, Shaftesbury Ward and Days Hotel Census Output Area (COA 95GG390012). (Source: NISRA)
## 15 Appendix 6 – Steering Group Members

The following provides a short overview of the groups represented on the project steering group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department for Employment &amp; Learning (DEL)</td>
<td>DEL Manages a range of training and employment measures and programmes, and provides funding for institutions in the Further and Higher Education sectors. Research And Evaluation Branch (REB) conducts research and evaluation for DEL - in particular for skills monitoring and forecasting - to help the Department (DEL) make its programmes more effective.</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Belfast Partnership Board (SBPB)</td>
<td>This is a multi sectoral body, comprising representatives of the community, private, statutory and political sectors which was set up in 1998 to co-ordinate the development and implementation and integrated regeneration strategy aimed at addressing the key issues affecting the most disadvantaged communities of South Belfast. One of its key thematic priorities is economic development and unemployment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy Row Community Forum (SRCF)</td>
<td>This is an umbrella body for community organisations which operate in the Sandy Row area of South Belfast. Sandy Row falls within the Shaftesbury Ward of South Belfast. The Forum was set up in 1996 and delivers a range of programmes covering early years, after schools, health promotion, education, youth, elderly and employability support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gasworks Employment Matching Service (GEMS)</td>
<td>Belfast GEMS is a local labour market intervention, which addresses the employability of residents of the most disadvantaged areas of South and East Belfast. The governing instrument for the initiative is provided by South Belfast Partnership Board. It is funded by Belfast Regeneration Office through the Department for Employment and Learning, as well as Belfast City Council, Laganside Corporation, Belfast Local Strategic Partnership and Halifax plc.</td>
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