



Re-tweed

Pulling the Threads Together

A Co-operation Development project with The Langholm Initiative and ReTweed, funded by the Dumfries and Galloway LEADER programme.





BACKGROUND

Project Managers at the Langholm Initiative first became aware of ReTweed following a feature on ITV's "Border Life" in 2017. Given the local interest in textiles and sewing skills which had been identified during the Langholm Initiative project "Building a Future for Eskdale", contact was established with ReTweed Project Manager Hazel Smith and a study visit from Langholm to Eyemouth was undertaken in November 2017, funded by the Community Learning Exchange Fund.

Langholm staff and volunteers met the Eyemouth team and enjoyed an interactive information session which explored their business model and their training model. They were so inspired and motivated by the visit, that an application was then submitted to Dumfries and Galloway LEADER to allow a six-month period of collaboration and co-operation and an exchange of skills and learning, commencing July 2018.



DIARY OF EVENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

July 2018

The first formal meeting took place in Langholm with project workers and volunteers from both communities. Participants from Eyemouth led on a mapping exercise of the ReTweed journey over the last two years and the Retweed model was examined, in an honest appraisal of what worked and what didn't. Plans were made for joint workshops where skills would be exchanged, and learning undertaken in a very practical fashion and some consultancy & development support from ReTweed's Founder delivered.

August 2018

Work commenced on a "Business Model Canvas" for Langholm. The document is still a work in progress but intrinsically focusses on Education, Training, Employment and Enterprise for Textiles encompassing:

- Value Proposition i.e. outcomes, objectives, products and services required to meet the needs of target community / customers.
- Key partners and suppliers – strategic / working partners and suppliers along the entire business.
- Revenue Streams – funding / trading income.
- Aspirations – Initially scope out aspects of Key activities and ethics.

During the business planning processes, it became apparent that there were elements of the ReTweed training and business model that were not relevant to the Langholm context. The approach for Langholm needed to be a more industry-led model which responded to employability and skills needs of a broader demographic, with a particular focus on young people and those with latent textiles' industry skills. This needed to balance the emergent industry requirements for specific skills for weaving and knitted textiles.

Subsequently partners and suppliers, potential revenue streams and objectives vary considerably from the Eyemouth and Langholm Models. However, having an established and successful training and business model in textiles, as the basis for strategic and action planning for Langholm has been critical to ensuring a clear project proposal that is fit for purpose.





The first practical workshop, “Feel the Fear and Sew Anyway” took place in the Retweed training centre, with Tutor Jill Harrison providing a hands-on guide for beginners. Seven women from Langholm travelled to Eyemouth and learned the basics of using a sewing machine and troubleshooting common problems. Using the excellent resources at ReTweed, each participant came away with a lovely cushion of which they were justifiably proud. Feedback from the day was very positive:

Q. ‘Describe the day in three words’

‘Inspiring, educating, enjoyable.’ ‘Friendly, Informative, enjoyable’ ‘Informative, fun, productive.’ ‘Sociable, empowering, joyous’

Q. ‘What did you learn during the day?’

‘I learnt about different stitches, how to change the length & width of stitches, how to thread my machine properly and what overlocking is and how to do it.’ ‘The length for stitches, tension, how to do different stitches, how to thread the machine, and the correct way to load the bobbin, how to make a cushion.’ ‘I learned a way of troubleshooting problems with the sewing machine by thinking logically and giving it a go.’

October 2018 Caldbeck Study Trip

To be able to appraise different business models, representatives from Langholm and Eyemouth attended a workshop at the WoolClip in Caldbeck, Cumbria. Wool Clip is a Cooperative and their collaborative working ethics are based on of self-help and helping others, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, all Wool Clip cooperative members need to subscribe to the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, caring for others and in the case of Wool Clip that includes the land and the livestock i.e. sheep.

With some initial funding, The Wool Clip has gone from strength-to-strength and is now a self-sustaining co-operative with between 12 – 15 members at any given time. The delegation from Langholm and Eyemouth were warmly welcomed by a long-standing member of the Wool Clip who delivered an informative presentation mapping the set-up and business development achievements of the Woolclip followed by a Q&A where advice, information and experiences were shared openly.



Transferrable elements

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Both Langholm and Eyemouth would benefit from a collaborative / co-operative model. Many of the graduates from ReTweed for example, would progress into self-employment and don’t because as they themselves have reported “I was isolated in my life before I came to ReTweed and I don’t want to be isolated in my work.” Others have commented that despite doing Business Gateway Training Courses, they still didn’t have the confidence to set-up and run their own businesses. Part of the success of the Woolclip model is that members help one another with practical and business support – there is an ethic of ‘playing to individual strengths’ which underpins individual and collective working.

Q. ‘What was the other learning from the Study Trip day?’

Although the Study Trip was predominately for the benefit of the Langholm Delegation – the benefits were not restricted to them. The ReTweed Team who had collectively been speculating on the potential for a Business Incubator type model for graduates felt encouraged to explore the development of this further. Since then, they have secured a clear project action plan, funding and premises to set-up their own Business Incubator – in part, this was inspired and informed by the study trip to Caldbeck. Although the Woolclip is specifically a co-operative based around wool craft skills the working ethics of helping others, self-responsibility, honesty, social responsibility and equality are directly transferable as is the collective business model and the staffing model for their retail activities. These elements are transferrable to any other creative industry and enterprise.

The mentoring model adopted by Woolclip would be useful to both ReTweed and Langholm – where more confident, skilled experiences makers/entrepreneurs give support, guidance and encouragement to new members who are starting out in their creative enterprises.

Langholm will need to work on ensuring that whatever learning and progression opportunities they develop within their future textiles project, has appeal to a broad demographic including younger audiences. The Woolclip members are all women and the majority are older women.

Collective branding, marketing and PR has been beneficial to all the businesses within the Woolclip and now has prestige with customers around the world who want quality wool products. This is a transferrable component which would help new enterprise in both Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. If Langholm and ReTweed can provide some umbrella of ‘brand’ and quality assurance, whilst supporting small creative businesses by promoting them through this brand then this will help them succeed. Many small makers and entrepreneurs don’t succeed as they cannot promote retail/sales or indeed establish their channels to market.



November 2018

The second skills-based workshop “Appliqué Self Expression Through Textiles” took place at ReTweed, with a group of 7 participants from Langholm travelling to Eyemouth for an intensive learning day based around practical and creative textiles skills. In this workshop participants were introduced to a range of sewing and craft techniques and basic design principles; learning about colour and pattern with an introductory to artistry in textiles. Again, feedback was incredibly positive.

Q. What did you learn during the day?
 ‘How ReTweed is set up to serve its community’ ‘To have confidence in myself and not be afraid to ask’ ‘That applique isn’t as daunting as I thought’ ‘I enjoyed all aspects of the day. Particularly loved our tutor who was so patient’

November 2018: Further meetings took place with ReTweed’s Founder and the team at Langholm to monitor progress of this Collaboration Project against objectives and to explore in more detail what a training and business model in the Langholm context might look like.

Learning Outcomes

During the process of the cross-border collaboration, a variety of business and training needs and opportunities emerged for Langholm. With these opportunities, came a realisation that a considered and phased approach to developing a textiles initiative in Langholm was required. Langholm’s model needs to be ‘industry-led’ and respond to the emerging resurrection of textiles manufacturing in Langholm and the surrounding area. The ReTweed model was initially based around promoting skills development, reducing social isolation, addressing the issues of social exclusion and poverty for women in rural Berwickshire. Although these elements are relevant to the Langholm setting, they are only part of the picture and they need to be balanced with responding to the needs of local business and industry.

November 2018: The third practical workshop “Pricing and Placing your Product” with Lesley Shepperson took place in Langholm with nine participants. Lesley runs a successful business making high quality leather goods and had many valuable insights to impart. This was a challenging workshop and feedback was very constructive.

‘It was very helpful to understand and analyse the difference between making things that you like as a hobby and making things that will sell as a viable business to cover all of your costs, wages and provide a profit’

‘It took a bit of getting my head round it all. But I really was fixed on the product pricing and profit margins, extremely interesting and I would like to develop this further and learn how to cost’

This workshop is a must for anyone starting out – We aim to secure funding to deliver it to the graduates of ReTweed who move on into self-employment. It should be a core training element of Business Gateway Training and is critical to sustainable success (ReTweed Founder).



December 2018

The final practical workshop took place in Elliott’s Shed, Langholm where the beautiful Tarras Tweed is woven. Participants got an outstanding learning experience of spinning and hand weaving. Feedback was extremely positive, and the business owner is now considering offering further workshops and potentially taking on a part time employee in the future.

December 2018: The Project Managers from Langholm and Eyemouth attended a meeting in Hawick to discuss the newly established Centre of Excellence for Textiles with Borders Business Gateway and the Centre Project Manager. Funded by the South of Scotland Economic Partnership, this project signals a recognition of the renewed energy and appetite for textiles in the South of Scotland and the communities of Langholm and Eyemouth are keen to be supportive and involved as this new Centre develops.



January 2018: Final Conclusion

For a small investment of funding the benefits of this collaboration have been widespread across the whole of the South of Scotland. Both agencies involved also benefited from the networks of support, business links and public/ third sector partnership that were already established. This cross border collaboration between Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders has been timely given the proposed economic development and social cohesion aspirations emerging from the South of Scotland Economic Partnership.

The Langholm Initiative has already begun providing training and supporting new employees into textiles businesses in the area. They now have a clear picture of the labour market context and the skills gaps in textiles that are critical to the success of local businesses. Work on their Business Plan will continue based on this labour market intelligence and economic development aspirations for the area. Further funding has been applied for to continue the work in a new project entitled “Weaving a Future for Eskdale”

ReTweed has developed a project plan for a Business Incubator and secured funding to pilot this as an opportunity for graduates of their 12-week courses. They have also secured contracts with industry to produce high end products that the beneficiaries of the Business Incubator will manufacture; giving them a guaranteed income.

Project Managers of both agencies reflected on the critical elements of success and concluded that both agencies (in the spirit of complete cooperation for the common good) shared all they had in the way of best practice, skills and opportunities. Setting a tone for the future, we hope, for the South of Scotland.



Re-weed

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