

Place:

BeginsSpace, Fitzroy Street, Cambridge

Type of Meanwhile project:

Enterprise Incubation

Meanwhile funding: £10,000

Stakeholders:

Martin Clark: BeginsSpace founder, Director of CityLife LTD;

Jeremy Parsons: BeginsSpace mentor

Prudential: Property Owners

The Meanwhile project was taken forward by Jeremy Parsons, Martin Clarke and Keystone Development Trust. The funding was managed by CityLife.

Cambridge



When the number of empty units in Cambridge began to rise, various local groups became aware of the necessity for community engagement and the potential of Meanwhile activity as a possible solution to the problem. One of these groups was CityLife, who run the Social Enterprise Centre on the outskirts of central Cambridge.

Project aims...

CityLife's Social Enterprise Centre is not central and it has no high-street presence so Martin Clark, director of City Life and Jeremy Parsons wanted to see whether the project would benefit from a position on the high street where it would be more accessible to the general public. The temporary nature of the Meanwhile lease gave them the opportunity to test out this idea and create a temporary hub for social enterprise which they named BeginsSpace.

BeginsSpace is a place to "inspire and enable entrepreneurs" providing free support and space for those wishing to start up a social enterprise, community initiative or an innovative business. It is a hub that facilitates various activities such as drop-in mentoring services provided by Jeremy, hot-desking facilities, shared work spaces, meeting rooms and event spaces. The hope is that new projects and businesses will be created as a result of this facility.



'We have resources, facilities and services to offer from helping people to formulate their ideas, to mentoring teams who have made a start but hit a dead end, to meeting rooms, informal talks and even the offer of shared working space for up to three months.'

Jeremy Parsons

'We want to use the space to encourage breaking of boundaries of different social groups and networks.'

Jeremy Parsons

Project outcomes...

BeginSpace found an adequate unit on a busy, pedestrianised street next to Grafton Shopping Centre and obtained a temporary lease from Prudential, the owners of the property. Prudential proved to be quite flexible with how the space could be used as there are plans for future redevelopment on the site.

There is the capacity for 15 projects to be based at BeginSpace and there are a mixture of people that come through the door: people with new ideas, people with setbacks in their project, people reviewing their options. Martin explained that, "What is appealing to them is that it is flexible and free".



Upstairs:

- Semi-private rooms for regular visitors
- Kitchen, WC & storage facilities
- Private meeting area



Back of shop:

- Informal seating area
- Desk space
- Storage room



Front of shop:

- Entrance space
- Drop-in hot desks
- Ideas board
- Meeting room



Entrance:

- BeginSpace signage
- Glass frontage

Nick Thorn, PA Consulting



'At BeginSpace you'll typically find me hot-desking between two and four days a week. The hot-desk space with free internet was what attracted me to come in when it first opened. I met BeginSpace's Jeremy Parsons in October 2009 and he continues to be my mentor. The general BeginSpace ethos has definitely enabled me to make a step forward towards my goal and the opportunity has helped me focus and meet contacts who are helpful to my particular business ideas.'

Networks...

One of BeginSpace's main objectives is to connect people and groups with each other and with resources. To encourage Cambridge's many networks to communicate, three different projects are happening simultaneously: BeginSpace, Changing Spaces and the window display of Transitions Cambridge (who support BeginSpace). Other organisations, such as Business Link, hire the meeting rooms.

BeginSpace also tries to have overlapping activities to stimulate further crossover, creating new relations and generating new ideas. Currently it is used as an exhibition space for local artists to display their work and they hold a weekly event called 'Open Coffee' where people can come and informally network and find out what's going on in the area.

'The biggest challenge was finding the right unit and starting up the project on a very tight budget. The £5,000 start-up grant helped pay for the setting-up and general running costs but support was also given locally. Students and artists have helped to decorate the space, people have donated furniture and the city council have provided a 20% rate relief.'

Martin Clark


Is it a success..?

Something is happening with around sixteen different organisations as a consequence of them coming to Begin Space. According to Martin, this test phase has proved that it can work and that there is a role for a space where people can pass through. Most importantly Begin space is a great showcase and inspiration for anyone wanting to start up something new.

For the community of Cambridge, this project has turned an otherwise disused space into a resource for the area. It has also helped to encourage the strengthening of local networks and therefore increased Cambridge's social capital. For the building owners, bringing the building into use has provided security, prevented long term damage of the property and has canceled the empty shop tax.



Regina Raycheva Transparent Pasta



'BeginSpace has helped me to develop and make my idea realistic. It has helped me go from step to step and move forward. I have found more motivation to prove my idea is a worthwhile one and develop it further. It has motivated me to talk to others about an idea which was only in my mind before. Specialist advice from people with experience and knowledge is very important at the start up stage and that's what I'm getting at BeginSpace!'

Incubator Footfall:

- 2/3 members of the public per day, drop in out of curiosity
- 3 people per day come in for set appointments
- 8 regular users, get on with their own enterprises
- 30-40 people have had meaningful contact with BeginSpace