

# GREEN TRAIN: ICT Recycling & Personal Development



**An external review of achievement  
and success**



November 2014

[www.egconsulting.co.uk](http://www.egconsulting.co.uk)

## WHAT IS REBOOT CAMBRIDGE CIC?

Repairs, refurbishes and recycles computers, components and other peripherals. The CIC then sells on, or donates, the repaired, refurbished or recycled equipment to people, home and abroad, who can benefit from cheap, recycled, computers or components. In addition, as part of its mission and with the provision of technicians and trainers with appropriate qualifications, the CIC offers learners practical courses on how to diagnose faults; disassemble a computer, test and replace components; wipe hard drives; add operating systems and office software; and much much more. Courses are mapped against City & Guilds ICT recycling NVQ competence. Training is provided to a wide range of people, and this includes the Lottery-funded GREEN TRAIN: ICT Recycling & Personal Development project.

GREEN TRAIN aims to provide personal development, training, volunteering and employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed, socially disadvantaged and marginalised people; and achieve zero landfill by recycling computers and computer components.

Reboot Cambridge CIC is based in Cottenham, near Cambridge.

[www.rebootcambridge.org.uk](http://www.rebootcambridge.org.uk)

Twitter: @RebootCambsCIC.

## WHAT IS EG: CONSULTING?

Founded in 2006 and based in Bury St. Edmunds **eg: consulting** is an advisory, development, evaluation and fundraising consultancy targeted at medium sized voluntary and community sector organisations; and public sector agencies. In almost 8 years the consultancy (in combination with Community Interest Company *Big Society Funding*) has worked with 65 clients, including assessing their positive impact and thus helping them to meet their organisational aspirations for growth and development.

[www.egconsulting.co.uk](http://www.egconsulting.co.uk)

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## CASE STUDY: NICOLA ELEY



### **How did you find out about the Green Train Project?**

*I heard about the Green Train course through my support worker for Mental Health. She explained the course to me and suggested it would be a good opportunity for me to gain a qualification and reference so I could get back into employment.*

*Previously, over two decades ago, I'd worked for Philips in Cambridge for 8 years assembling PCB's and this included a 6 months training programme in computing. I'd had a career break to bring up my two children. I realised how much technology had developed over 20 years so I felt that the Green Train course would enable me to rebuild my confidence and increase my knowledge with PCs and new technology.*

### **What have you learnt and gained on the Green Train Project?**

*I've really regained my confidence with PC's and found that the inside of a computer isn't as scary as I'd first thought. I now know the names of all the components and how to download drivers, and I am now familiar with the different types of media players and how information is stored and sorted within a computer.*

*Following the Green Train course and my increased confidence with computers I think I can now do a huge range of practical tasks with computers.*

**How do you think your skills will benefit you in the future?**

*I hope that the Green Train course will give me the reference I need and the qualification which will hopefully go to increase my employability.*

**What did you enjoy most about the Green Project?**

*I enjoyed dismantling the computer and seeing what's inside, and was surprised by how little there actually was inside a computer. I have learnt and become more confident working in small groups.*

## BACKGROUND & SERVICE DELIVERY

1 Registered as a membership organisation of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations across the East of England region, Reboot Cambridge CIC's precursor was a charity called COVER. Its mission was to support and develop VCS social, economic, environmental and inclusion activity regionally. Alongside a wide range of representational and infrastructural support services COVER had also developed a direct service provision arm centred on an ICT recycling project, based at its large industrial unit in Waterbeach (north of Cambridge just off the A10). This subsequently became an impressive ICT recycling and refurbishment centre, on an industrial scale, which was then managed by the social enterprise arm of COVER, called i-TRUST. In 2010 a successful bid was made to the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities programme by COVER (as the accountable body) to underpin and scale up its work with disadvantaged and 'difficult to engage' people, and the project was entitled 'GREEN TRAIN'.

As part of a pilot project - leading up to the submission of the Lottery bid - at the ICT recycling centre, people with mental ill-health, long-term unemployed and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) accessed workplace opportunities and volunteering placements in a safe and supported environment. The beneficiaries - often identified as being the furthest from the labour market and experiencing compounded social and economic disadvantage and exclusion - gained valuable work experience, personal development and life skills coaching. The training was focused on central functions relating to the ICT recycling operation, whereby beneficiaries are skilled up to the industry standard of computer component stripping, re-use and recycling; component diagnostics and testing; and computer rebuilding from the motherboard up. Computers were then made available at very low cost for

recycling into the VCS for use by other socially disadvantaged individuals – often facing digital exclusion themselves - accessing services in other VCS and social enterprises (hence as indirect beneficiaries) in the region.

Highly significantly, and underpinning the innovative approach adopted from the outset, was an environmental - GREEN - objective: to recycle and re-use computer components which otherwise would be discarded as landfill/environmental waste. A strong ecological ethos was established at the beginning; and 'investment' income for this emerging social enterprise model from the Big Lottery allowed for the development of a more sustained organisational endeavour to achieve the additional outputs and outcomes.

2 Furthermore, as a key component to service delivery and project ethos, the GREEN TRAIN aimed to address four of the five identified (by New Economics Foundation) ways to wellbeing for those with low well-being and mental ill-health, namely CONNECTING; BEING ACTIVE; and KEEP LEARNING; and GIVING. These headings are broken down as follows:

- 'Connecting' means beneficiaries connecting with people around them in a work setting, building connections that then support and enrich their everyday lives
- 'Being active' entails physical activity which beneficiaries will enjoy, and suits their level of mobility and fitness
- 'Learning' new skills and things will make beneficiaries more confident and more likely to take responsibility for their lives and own everyday wellbeing.
- 'Giving' time by joining GREEN TRAIN would link them to a wider community which can be rewarding, create connections with others, make them happier and therefore improve their emotional, physical wellbeing and resilience.

3 In receiving four year grant funding from the Reaching Communities programme, and combined with the above four ways to wellbeing, the GREEN TRAIN project set itself the following four outcomes to be achieved by the end of year 4:

- Training Outcome: 256 long-term unemployed people will have improved their life and social interaction skills, confidence, job finding skills and employability
- Socio-economic Outcome: 256 long-term unemployed will have better mental and physical health enabling them to volunteer and become work ready

- Socio-environmental Outcome: 1,000 socially disadvantaged people to benefit from recycled and cheaper ICT equipment
- Green Outcome: 100% of all donated ICT equipment, up to 1,000 computer components per week, will be recycled rather than being landfilled.

4 COVER, and subsequently Reboot Cambridge CIC, is to receive funding from the Big Lottery Fund totalling £299,493 over four years. The grant was agreed on a sliding scale of £143,885 in the first year, followed by £74,786 in year 2; £50,937 in year 3 and £29,885. The initial thinking, and in the context of social entrepreneurial development, was that the grant income would be part of the pump priming and investment required to ensure longer-term sustainability; hence the tapering off of the grant income from year 2 onwards. It should also be noted that a significant element of the first year's grant (£47,500) was for capital expenditure – essentially a reconfiguration of work and storage space at Waterbeach – and this asset base improvement was somewhat short-lived as explained further in paragraph 6 below.

In sum, and in revenue terms the Big Lottery grant income contributes to the GREEN TRAIN project delivery team comprising four staff members: Recycling Operations Manager, Workshop Manager, ICT Trainer/Technician and Administrator. Other project costs, such as travel, tools, marketing etc are also covered.

5 The service delivery offer to beneficiaries is free training spread over five days, and is a highly practical 'hands on' course that shows participants how to:

- Build and upgrade a PC using recycled or repurposed components
- Diagnose faults, disassemble a computer and replace components
- Wipe hard drives to remove data
- Install operating systems and office software
- Test and PAT test for electrical safety.

If the beneficiary's computer then works and passes the PAT test then they will be deemed to have completed (and passed) the course. This training allows the beneficiaries to have a domestic ICT repair competence, plus an entry-level industry ICT recycling competence. Currently, the courses run Monday to Friday from 9.30am till 3.30pm, on a monthly basis, at the CIC's office in Cottenham. Previously, until June 2013, the courses were held at the Waterbeach industrial estate.



6 At this juncture it is vital to outline key aspects of the project's journey. Since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 and severe retrenchment of public finances, leading to deep cuts, the economic climate for the VCS sector has become progressively more challenging. This has combined, in the case of COVER, with the dismantling of the regional governance architecture and an almost complete diminution of funding for regional infrastructure support agencies such as COVER. The resulting austerity led to the demise of COVER in spring 2013, just as the delivery of the Green Train project had reached half way through year 2. By then the project had become well established, well known throughout large sections of the VCS and impactful. However, service delivery – which had commenced in August 2011 – ceased completely in June 2013; and Lottery funding was suspended.

Following the inevitable turmoil and winding down of COVER, it was resolved by staff involved in service delivery that GREEN TRAIN had potential to be resurrected 'phoenix from the ashes' style; and operationally this could be speedily achieved by the establishment of a bespoke Community Interest Company. This was done as soon as practicable and following protracted negotiations with the Big Lottery funding resumed, and service delivery re-commenced in early 2014. To re-cap, there was a hiatus in the project's delivery from June 2013 to March 2014. This external review is, therefore, examining achievements and success – and hence impact – for a two year and half year period; and it is recognized that because of the significant organizational challenges presented by the closing down of COVER and the subsequent establishment of Reboot Cambridge CIC that it is best to consider achievement of outputs and outcomes over a two year period. It is further noted that the entire operation, from March 2014 onwards, takes place in a very much reduced (and less salubrious) space on a small industrial site in Cottenham with severely degraded facilities (compared to the industrial scale of Waterbeach), leading to space restrictions and related organizational challenges.



## REVIEW REMIT

7 The consultant was required:

- To review and evaluate the achievement of the GREEN TRAIN project's Big Lottery Fund outputs and outcomes as set out in paragraph 3 above and in the context of a two year period:
  - 128 long-term unemployed people will have improved their life and social interaction skills, confidence, job finding skills and employability
  - 128 long-term unemployed will have better mental and physical health enabling them to volunteer and become work ready
  - 500 socially disadvantaged people to benefit from recycled and cheaper ICT equipment
  - 100% of all donated ICT equipment, up to 1,000 computer components per week, will be recycled rather than being landfilled.

Definitive evaluation on a very tight budget is not possible, and therefore, this brief review and evaluation seeks to establish progress and impact at the conclusion of two year's full operation - although considering the particular challenges presented by COVER's demise and the setting up of a new organisational structure to continue service delivery – it is the view of the consultant that this does not take into account on a human and personal level the enduring challenges this presented; and consequent impact of measuring project outputs and outcomes.

In undertaking the review of the Consultant has adopted the following methodology:

- Examining and analysing: the internally collated data and monitoring information and yearly reports to identify achievement of outcomes; several individual Case Studies following these up with telephone interviews; staff reports and other staff observations aimed at securing their views on achievements and success thus far.

It is understood that this review will assist in the process of identifying the need and support for an enhanced service delivery going forward - beyond the Lottery funded period.

“ Reboot has given me an opportunity to work within an environment that deals with all aspects of computers. Specifically recycling and repairing them. My confidence has really grown...I now want a career in computers...” Sutton Miah



## FINDINGS – ACHIEVEMENTS, SUCCESSES & IMPACT SO FAR

### **Internally collated data and monitoring information to identify achievement of outputs and outcomes**

8        The GREEN TRAIN programme – up to October 2014 – has benefited 126 long-term unemployed people, mainly young men and the highly socially marginalised. The overwhelming majority of these beneficiaries (106) accessed the programme from the start in August 2011 through to July 2013. In the first year (2011-12) 10 training programmes were run, with between five and 11 participants on each programme. Since re-commencing the project in spring 2014 four training programmes have been run benefiting a further 20 participants. In addition, some 120 work experience placements at Reboot Cambridge CIC and its predecessor I-Trust have been provided, offering further ICT training and learning opportunities for those that had completed their initial training programmes.

In total 18 have gone on to become active volunteers at Reboot, with the bulk of the volunteers (15) being actively engaged with the project when it was situated in Waterbeach and had more organisational capacity and space.

Over 2,300 computers have been refurbished, and an astonishing 456 have been recycled into the local VCS and other sectors (just a few dozen short of the target for the whole four years of the project). The environmental benefits arising from GREEN TRAIN are profound, and considerably – despite the project service's hiatus – way beyond targets originally set. In weight terms (kgs) we discovered that 234,964 kgs of computer equipment and materials have been saved from landfill (metals, cables, alloy and plastics) and 161,924 computer components have been recycled (again the target was 52,000 per annum) and hence more than envisaged.

9        The team collect meticulous records and based on 126 trainee participants we know that:

- 90% were male, and the bulk of them under 25 years old and not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- All were socially disadvantaged and jobless, with the majority deemed by referral agencies (see below) as 'difficult to engage'
- Participants resided in Cambridge and the immediate environs, including throughout Huntingdonshire, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire local authority areas
- A significant number had experienced enduring mental health problems and general life challenges, with consequently poor levels of wellbeing

- Participants had previously interest in ICT in a general sense

Participants have been referred from a wide range of local organisations to the GREEN TRAIN project from the Job Centre Plus services, Papworth Trust, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough YMCA, Richmond Fellowship, Cambridge African Community Group, MumNet and local CVS organisations. The team have worked hard to ensure that a steady stream of referrals can be secured; it is noted that this has proved less easy in 2014.

10 Internally collated findings demonstrate that significant achievements have been secured in individual's perceptions of positive outcomes for themselves, with the team collecting and then collating outcome scores from initial inception into the GREEN TRAIN project, and then when they 'exit' it (e.g. the training and other personal development support has been provided and a range of outcomes obtained which are measurable). The project team have conscientiously collected these scorings and beneficiaries used the GREEN TRAIN soft outcomes framework to self-assess themselves at the beginning and end of their programme, this entailed self-assessing themselves on 10 headings scoring (as below) from 1 which is very poor to 10 which is very good. In the first year of the project we were able to review the completed outcomes measurement for 75 beneficiaries; and more recently, the Consultant has reviewed a further 14 individual trainee records. From data collected up by the project team the average overall rate for participant wellbeing was 6.5, and when they exited it rose to 7.2 - which is a discernible improvement.

The project team used the following outcome headings as part of the framework:

- Useful employment skills • Work readiness • Independence
- Self management • Physical Health • Emotional – Mental health • Sense of well being • Motivation – taking responsibility
- Managing relationships • Drug alcohol use • Meaningful use of time

We learn from collective beneficiary results that the GREEN TRAIN project is securing real impact for them particularly in the context of:

- Their acquisition of relevant and useful employment skills
- Their improved abilities to manage themselves, be more independent and motivated, and use their time in a meaningful way
- Their overall enhanced 'work readiness' and preparedness to volunteer and then get a job
- Increased levels of confidence, and ability to cope with life

challenges with improved mental and emotional health  
- Reported higher levels of wellbeing and being content.

The team – with consecutive cohorts of trainees – recorded a range of key learning points around how there was a need to keep content and the training methods being employed under review and tailored to the specific learning needs of each group of trainees. This often corresponded to the predominant social and other needs within each group e.g. young NEET beneficiaries or at a different learning point from slightly older younger people with problems with mental health for examples. The approach from the outset has been highly personalised and focused on individual personal development that is best suited to each individual participant. Possibly disappointingly, whilst overall the positive outcome changes were recorded, it would be fair to say that for many the positive change was often limited excepting a handful of individual beneficiaries. In a couple of cases, unfortunately the direction of travel was marginally in the wrong direction but this was because both had marked a decreased score during their programme in relation to their physical health. The consultant would take the view that improved physical health was always likely to be a marginal area for improvement in terms of soft outcomes in the context of the GREEN TRAIN training programme. Overall, there is great comfort to be taken from the achievement of positive outcomes for an overwhelming number of beneficiaries and exemplary environmental impact – the Big Lottery funded GREEN TRAIN outputs and outcomes have been achieved and have been underpinned by some excellent individual results as exemplified in the case studying conducted by the Consultant.

“ Reboot gave me the chance to learn new things, enhance my abilities and make new friends. My life has changed after I was offered this job.” Adam



## CASE STUDIES DEMONSTRATING ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESS

11 The Consultant spoke to two randomly selected clients who had accessed the GREEN TRAIN project training programme: male and female. Many cases were discussed with the team to ascertain their views of beneficiary progression, and from these discussions the Consultant was easily able to identify a number of exemplar case studies which evidence further the achievement of outcomes as set out above in the review remit.

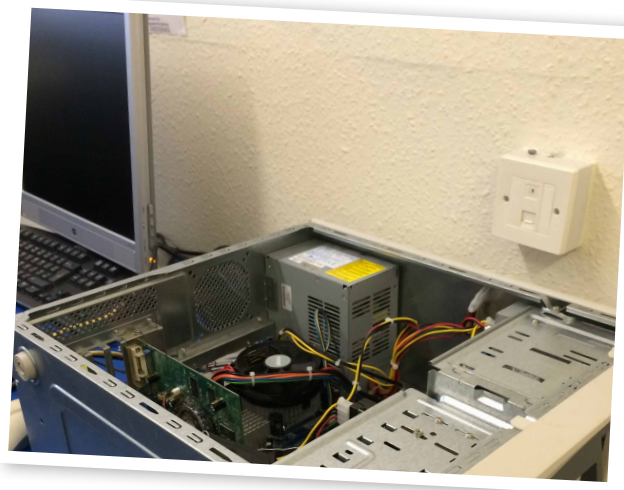
“As well as improving my knowledge I have also found working with others has boosted my confidence.”

Jamie Setchell

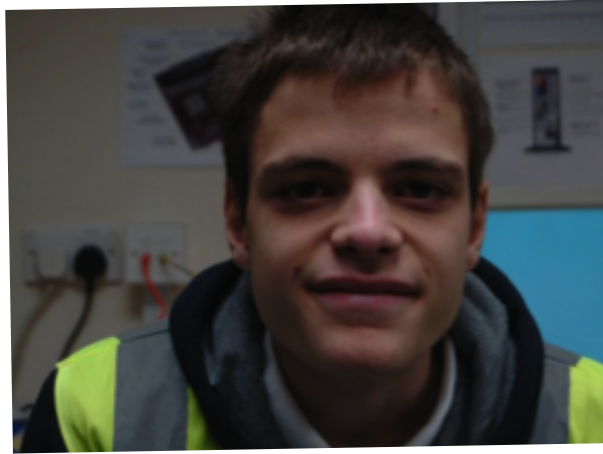
The beneficiaries spoken to by the Consultant were very forthright about the vital importance they attached to securing the training they had wanted, how it had contributed to their confidence and sense of wellbeing. They spoke of how they had as they entered the training programme felt some distance from the formal labour market and needed sensitive and tailored training provision in order to make a transition back into the world of employment. They had felt unsure about how to make progress in their lives and were unclear of personal goals, and had no compelling personal development plans. Both beneficiaries were now in secure and steady employment, and appeared to be optimistic about their work (and life) opportunities. These two case study findings correspond closely with the feedback reviewed above, and contribute to a strong sense of achievement and impact.

“I have got experience of getting into a routine and doing a full days work. I have found it beneficial to my confidence in meeting and working with new people.”

Suton Miah



## CASE STUDY: OLIVER GREEN



**How did you find out about the Green Train Project?**

*I was in my last year of GCSEs at Spring Common School Huntingdon and studying ICT. I found out about the course through one of my teachers and through Kevin who already worked at REBOOT. They recommended the course as they felt it would enable me to improve my skills and gain more confidence in a subject, which I really enjoy.*

**What have you learnt on the Green Train Project?**

*I have increased my knowledge of the inside of a computer and learnt how to use the operating system VISTA.*

**What have you gained from the Green Train Project?**

*My skills have greatly increased in the dismantling and rebuilding of computers.*

**How do you think your new skills will benefit you in the future?**

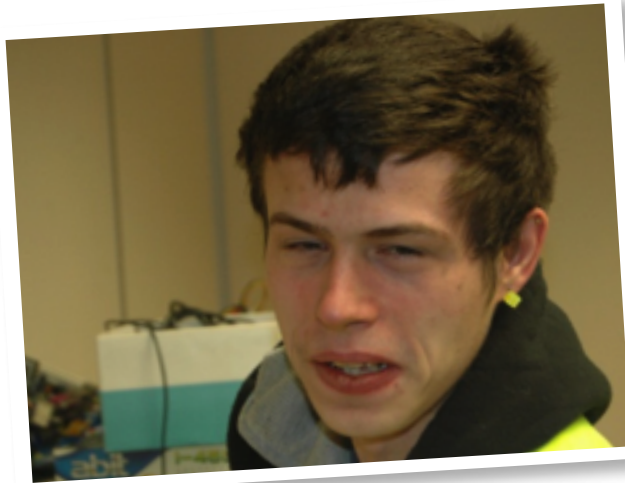
*I would like in the future to gain employment in the computer industry although I am not sure currently which particular aspect of computing I enjoy the most or would like to work in.*

**What did you enjoy most about the Grain Train Project?**

*I enjoyed the building my computer and I am looking forward to taking it home. I've also enjoyed installing and using a new operating system.*

The Reboot project team demonstrably put the beneficiary centre stage and this is abundantly clear when reviewing case files, talking to individual beneficiaries, reviewing formal reports and in discussion with the project staff team. There is a straightforward and soundly based appreciation of where each training participant is starting from, and how their initial enthusiasm for ICT can be nurtured and developed. Patience and perseverance are key to ensuring trainees get through the course, and many have significant and enduring health, social or other challenges, often compounded by their insecure housing tenure and a history of family and personal dysfunctionality. Working with this difficult to engage and struggling client group in such a successful manner is highly commendable, and reflects very well on the commitment and dedication of staff who demonstrably relish what they are doing and who they are doing it with.

### CASE STUDY: PAUL THURSTON



**How did you find out about the Green Train Project?**

*I got kicked out of school and so attend college at NACRO in Cambridge two days a week studying English and Maths. I come to Reboot once a week having found out about it through college – I want to get a qualification.*

**What have you learnt on the Green Train Project?**

*The Green Train course has enabled me to learn about processors and motherboards within a computer and the operating system Windows 7. It has also given me a sense of purpose to get up for instead of lying in bed!*



### What have you gained from the Green Train Project?

*I've found the course very enjoyable, and made friends with the other people. I am looking forward to taking my computer home so I can have one in my bedroom that is just mine to use.*

### How do you think your skills will benefit you in the future?

*I can now take apart and rebuild computers and I've gained new skills in downloading software.*

### What did you enjoy most about the Green Train Project?

*I now feel more confident in what I am doing and now know the names of the different parts within the computer and what they all do.*

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND VIEWS ON ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESS THUS FAR

12 The Consultant has met with staff to ascertain their personal views and observations on what the GREEN TRAIN project has recently achieved. Overall, they have provided a cogent and candid summary of what has been achieved so far and where activities have fallen short of achieving what was originally envisaged, and noteworthy the challenges thrown up by constrained financial resources and the current less than satisfactory project accommodation and its out of the way location. Since managing to resurrect the project under the Reboot Cambridge CIC model the team have struggled to return to previous beneficiary numbers. Clearly the team are doing all they can in promotional terms to address this with e-mailings, active Twitter feed and fresh, dynamic and engaging website.

The Consultant has noted the team's evident frustrations in relation to the immense challenges presented by the current (and on-going) adverse funding environment especially for a new small social enterprise; and the fact that this is compounded by funding cuts and resulting organizational difficulties elsewhere in the VCS. GREEN TRAIN is dependent upon the health and wellbeing of the local VCS sector, as a provider of referrals, donation of ICT equipment for refurbishment, repair and recycling and also as a recipient of refurbished ICT equipment.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

13 The closure of COVER in 2013, and the subsequently ceasing of project activities until spring 2014, has made a marked negative impact and one that would be expected. The team's resilience and sheer determination is however palpable – they have put this to one side and worked very hard to get the project back on course. Output and outcomes targets have still been achieved; projected activities outlined in the Lottery bid – tasks to make the project come to fruition and succeed – have been completed. Furthermore, the review has found from a range of collated sources including conversations with staff and case studying that there is strong evidence that beneficiaries have improved their life and social interaction skills, confidence, sense of wellbeing and employability prospects – with many not only improving their job readiness skills but actually getting employment.

There is also evidence of attempts being made to complement the tapering Big Lottery funding with earned income and some limited fundraising; the latter is being undermined somewhat because of the CIC's infancy and trackrecord. With declining Big Lottery funding in years 3 and 4 (as originally planned) the team is now urgently endeavouring, in a very chilly funding environment, to seek out alternative streams (or continuation Big Lottery grant funding) to cover training programmes with socially disadvantaged beneficiaries. This brief review has found that results and copious individual positive outcomes are soundly based and well-documented, and allow for Reboot Cambridge CIC to move forward over the coming months to secure that fresh income. The Consultant would urge the team to collect, as best they can, further 'destination' outcomes for beneficiaries to further entrench the evidence basis of future funding proposals. Lastly, the team will have to make even more strenuous attempts to profile and promote their work activities to ensure that targets continue to be met and that the overall number of beneficiaries are reached and access the ICT training and personal development programmes through to 2016.

