

# Brisbane & Parramatta Social Enterprise Hubs

providing real jobs for marginalised Australians

Running a small business can be a challenge at the best of times, but when that business is also a social enterprise, the challenges are multiplied. Social enterprises are non-profit businesses whose purpose is to provide employment opportunities for all Australians, particularly the many individuals who find themselves excluded from mainstream life and employment because they are refugees or have a disability, illness or other disadvantage.

SVA has set up two Social Enterprise Hubs in Australia to support the development of the social enterprise sector in this country. Their roles are to accelerate the growth and number of social enterprises by providing them with access to resources that would not otherwise be available or affordable. These include consulting, pro bono services, management tools and business skills.

The Hubs are made possible via a three-way partnership between local government, a corporation and SVA. They provide two levels of assistance to social enterprises: the high-touch Accelerator Program for selected enterprises and open services for all other social enterprises in the local area.

Each Hub gives intensive support to up to 10 enterprises through a so-called Accelerator Program, with each enterprise aiming to employ 10 to 15 marginalised people – a total of 100-150 people. More specifically, the Hub Accelerator provides:

- Access to pro-bono legal and accounting services
- Access to mentors for business planning and strategy
- Assistance in tendering and support for identifying procurement opportunities

- Access to SVA training
- Detailed performance monitoring including social return on investment assessment
- Access to funds for capital investment
- Due diligence processes for investment in new and existing social enterprises

Other local social enterprises will receive support to help them grow their businesses and offer more jobs to marginalised people. These services include:

- *Hub Meeting Place*: monthly meetings to serve as forums for networking, training and guest speakers.
- *Hub Market*: a quarterly forum with social enterprises and local business to facilitate tendering and networking and to identify and open up procurement opportunities.
- *Hub Connect*: web resource to allow connectivity between social enterprises across Australia, including downloadable resources and promotion of the sector.
- *Hub Commerce*: quarterly business plan review service provided by a panel of business experts. This forum will also be used as the gateway into the accelerator program.

## WHY SVA BACKS THE HUBS

SVA decided to create the Hubs to support the development of the social enterprise sector in Australia because of the important role those enterprises play in overcoming social exclusion and providing real jobs to marginalised Australians. The Hubs are an education, networking and advocacy resource for all social enterprises.

## GROWTH

In 2006, SVA initiated the first Hub in Brisbane in partnership with accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and Brisbane City Council. The Brisbane Hub Accelerator Program today supports seven enterprises including businesses in garden maintenance, pest control, catering, cleaning, farm fresh food to city families and creative arts.

The second Hub was launched in Parramatta in September 2007, with a partnership between SVA, Parramatta City Council and the Allco Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Allco Finance Group. The Parramatta Hub is in the process of assessing applications for inclusion within its Accelerator Program.

A number of enterprises have received IT hardware, training, and access to funding and low interest loans through their participation in the Accelerator program.

## PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Early evaluations from the Brisbane Hub show returns of \$3 for every \$1 invested. The six enterprises currently within the Brisbane Hub Accelerator employ more 73 people, 52 (71%) of whom were previously marginalised from the workforce.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

SVA plans to have rolled out 10 Hubs across Australia by the end of 2009 with each of them supporting at least six social enterprises (resulting in more than 60 enterprises supported) and employing between 10 to 15 marginalised employees (equating to more than 600 marginalised individuals into jobs by 2010). Discussions with several local governments across Australia are already underway.

The Australia-wide network of Hubs would share common information resources (website, intranet) and network via quarterly Roundtables. This would create scale across the Hubs, ensure shared learnings and allow social enterprises to establish a national presence.

SVA's longer term goal is to document the modified work practices within social enterprises so that they can be adopted by many more corporations and employers throughout Australia.