

# 1. Who we are

Sock Mob Events is a unique social enterprise that coaches homeless and formerly homeless people to lead guided walking tours and facilitate events. Our vision is to revolutionise perceptions of homelessness by bringing together people from diverse walks of life together with those who have experienced homelessness, to hear their stories and break down the barriers of stereotype and prejudice that separate them. We also empower and enable economically marginalised individuals such as the homeless to make a living and take positive action for their lives.

## Our Vision:

- To connect people from different walks of life in hearing and understanding the realities of street life, and by doing so cut through the stigmas and harmful prejudices that can prevent homeless and vulnerably housed people from participating meaningfully in the social and cultural life of the city.
- To offer the opportunity of being involved in Sock Mob Events and earning an income to many homeless and vulnerably housed people across London.
- To co-construct walking tours and ethical events collaboratively, honestly and openly as a team.
- To maintain the ethos of social enterprise – i.e. as trading purely for social benefit and reinvesting profits back into the enterprise to bring our vision to life and to a wider audience.

### 1.1 Where we have come from

Sock Mob Events has evolved from the work of [The Sock Mob](#), an informal volunteer network of 600+ members, that engages with London's street people through weekly walks, using the icebreaking power of socks and conversation. After eight years of facilitating and establishing this network, a group of individuals including volunteers and street people co-constructed a new idea – guided walking tours led by homeless guides. The idea was piloted in August 2010 and, following much commercial success and media acclaim, was formally incorporated as a social enterprise, Sock Mob Events.

Today, Sock Mob Events is a social enterprise (registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee). Sock Mob Events capitalises on a commercially untapped market niche of delivering alternative walking tours led by homeless guides, which offer a historical but also unique perspective of the city, as perceived through the lens of homelessness. In line with the social enterprise model, the lion's share of the money received from the tours and events goes to the homeless and vulnerably housed

individuals, while any profit made will be directly reinvested back into the enterprise to engage more homeless and vulnerably housed individuals.

With the help of initial funding from Unltd and The Funding Network, we are aiming to be a self-sufficient social enterprise by 2012, i.e. to derive 100% of its income from trading, including tickets sales from walking tours, events bookings, and social research contracts, as elaborated on in the following section.

## **1.2 Where we are going**

We plan to scale up the walking tours and to diversify our portfolio by creating ethical corporate events aimed at the corporate market, including team building and away days. These events will be facilitated by a team of homeless coordinators utilising their specific skill sets. The homeless and vulnerably housed individuals involved in the tours all have individual skills that are often creative and artistic, such as i.e. sculpting, craft work and embroidery, playing the piano, poetry and performance, which can be incorporated into workshops that they can deliver to corporate groups, with the help of other members of Sock Mob Events.

As well as being an additional income stream for the enterprise, the broader aim of these events is to turn on its head the power relationships between the homeless and other groups of people, empowering the homeless and encouraging other people to re-evaluate their pre-conceived perceptions of them.

The walking tours, and future events to be developed, also present an ideal business opportunity to explore a previously untapped niche in both the tourist, education and corporate/leisure events markets.

In addition to ethical events, we are also launching a social research stream in 2011, bringing together our practitioner perspective into social enterprise as well as high-level research skills, to create a unique hub for action research projects. Further details on this and the other elements being introduced will shortly be discussed.

## **1.3 Why Sock Mob Events?**

Homeless and vulnerably housed people face a substantial number of barriers to entering the labour market and accessing the social and cultural opportunities in the environment around them.

We believe that what needs to be changed is to offer a holistic and individualised approach, offering homeless and vulnerably housed people training and employment opportunities which utilise their creativity, resourcefulness and pre-existing knowledge, i.e. walking tours along the streets they know. By recognising this group's transience but also what they have to offer, the walking tours provide the homeless with a means of self-expression that generates empowerment and enjoyment in their work and, therefore, dedication to it.

**[Insert case studies/testimonials with images]**

#### **1.4 A quick note: what Sock Mob Events is not**

Sock Mob Events is not about developing poverty tourism – what some academics have referred to as ‘poorism’ – i.e. voyeuristically and superficially pointing out economically and ‘socially’ deprived areas. Instead, what Sock Mob Events aim to achieve through concepts such as Unseen Tours is to make a point about the state of the world we live in and highlight issues of social injustice. It should always be remembered that our tours and events are fundamentally authored and facilitated by people with direct experience of social marginalisation, who are as integral to the enterprise as any other member Sock Mob Events, and are also treated the same in terms of financial reimbursement and other support.

In short, we are not here to make a living *off* the homeless and other vulnerable individuals. We are here to make a living *with* them.