



In conversation

Ray Jenkins
CEO
Emerging Futures

and

Gilly Orr
Impact and External
Affairs Director, SASC

Emerging Futures is a community interest company which has been going for about seven years. We work with people with substance misuse problems who are experiencing low level mental health, homelessness or have some involvement with the criminal justice system. We provide community-based programmes and psycho-social interventions to support behavioural change. We work closely with partner agencies so that our clients get wraparound clinical or family support services.

Of our 200 employees, 75% have their own lived experience of substance misuse or homelessness. We see ourselves as an academy which offers opportunities, via recovery coaching and accredited courses, for people to work in the health and social care profession. We support individuals to build on their own experiences, and work with people effectively. We believe that to sustain change you need someone to love, something to do and somewhere to live.

Early on, we developed a strategic plan that included us providing a transitional housing element so that the people we were supporting could have a secure base. Housing has become the core of our work, allowing us to deliver a combined offer of housing and support. In the beginning we only had access to the Private Rental Sector (PRS). We learnt quickly that there are some landlords that are less scrupulous than others. We wanted to work with people we trusted and have a mixed portfolio. So, in order to improve the quality of the housing, we believed ownership was the route to explore.

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We looked at all the different products, including commercial deals, but, ultimately, it made sense to work with an organisation who shared values and also wanted to make a difference. Social investment was new to me but luckily not to our chair. We didn't jump in. It took us a couple of years of looking and doing our own due diligence to ask 'are we investment ready?' The organisation was growing, our contracts were growing, and we needed housing we controlled.

Taking social investment has had the desired effect of driving up the quality of the properties that we've taken on board so far. Internally, it's changed the dynamics of not just the board and the governance, but the executive team as well. The discipline of getting the investment has enabled us to invest in the capacity of that executive team, building our commercial sense. But that step change has been pushed down throughout the organisation. So local service managers have a commercial awareness of their responsibilities and how they prioritise work. I would say that we were always a professional organisation but now we are a commercial one too. Ownership has enabled us to concentrate on the offer to the people in our housing. Improve the quality of

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staff and the interactions. Focus on the impact on clients.

It has been a real learning curve but I think the organisation is in a much, much better position now. The whole team feel as though we've got that capacity and are more resilient. And I think from the off, certainly through the whole process of due diligence, we felt as though we were in a partnership with SASC. What we found is that it wasn't just about giving us the knowledge of what we can and can't do with the money. SASC offered commercial suggestions; they were willing to work flexibly when markets changed. So when house prices went up in areas we wanted to work, we made alternative plans. We've always found SASC willing to find a solution, as long as it's within the principles of our business plan and loan requirements. The flexibility has been invaluable.

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