

Swedish Study Visit

Leonardo Mobility

11 participants from West Midlands visited Skövde in Sweden to meet like-minded individuals from a range of industries to foster exchange of good practices.

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Introduction

The 'Women in Enterprise' project was designed to create opportunities for businesswomen in the UK to learn from their European counterparts, predominantly, those that normally don't engage at the European level.

Funds were sought from 'Leonardo Da Vinci' Lifelong learning programme to develop a project that supports lifelong learning and helps to foster exchange of good practices.

Sweden was selected as a destination for exchange; based on its success with small to medium size entrepreneurs. Although UK has a greater number of female business start-ups than Sweden; Sweden has higher rate of established female owned businesses after the first year (GEM 2007).

The participants would look at how these businesses are supported and how this support in Sweden is contributing to a much higher rate of survival after the first year of trading.

11 participants visited Skövde in Sweden in May 2011 for 1 week placement. A range of visits were arranged to learn from women entrepreneurs running businesses of all sizes in a wide variety of industries.

The outcomes from the study visit will allow participants to disseminate learning to their staff and colleagues. Go-Woman! will disseminate the findings to service providers and policy makers to learn from good practices.

The study visit allowed for a two-way knowledge transfer and opportunities for long-term co-operations.

What is 'Leonardo Da Vinci'?

The European Union Leonardo programme supports the development of skills and training. It funds work placements for trainees, workers and staff, and supports European projects to discuss common issues or develop training materials, courses and frameworks.

The programme is open to all UK organisations involved in work-based education and training and can help to build a skilled workforce. Projects involve working with European partners and offer a great experience for staff and learners, and long-term organisational benefits.

Leonardo is part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

About the Lifelong Learning Programme

The Lifelong Learning Programme is a European funding programme, which supports education and training across Europe. It is made up of several different programmes covering the whole spectrum of lifelong learning, one of which is Leonardo da Vinci (LDV).

Ecorys is the UK National Agency managing the LDV programme. Further details regarding Leonardo, LLP and ECORYS can be found at <http://www.leonardo.org.uk/>

Overview of 'Women in Enterprise'

The 'Women in Enterprise' study (WiE) programme 2011 has been devised by Go-Woman! Limited to enable women running small to micro-sized businesses responsible for training and development in that business; professionals delivering training or having responsibility for developing training plans associated with women's businesses, to enhance their skills and improve the competitiveness of their business, which in turn, may be passed onto other women.

Swedish partners were selected for the study visits because Sweden has developed an excellent support service for women running their own businesses and have a higher rate of established female owned businesses (GEM 2007 report).

The West Midlands is lagging behind other UK regions in women led enterprises, therefore this project is aimed at taking a group of women that either run their own business or those involved in providing support, delivering and training for women in business, to learn from good practice in Sweden.

Go-Woman! worked with an organisation called 2Core who specifically work with women and enterprise, from the Vastmanland region, Skövde, Sweden

2Core develops and implements projects in cooperation with local and regional government councils and other private and public organisations.

As a member of NRC (National Resource Centre for Women) they focus on entrepreneurship, leadership and management issues.

2Core is active in many networks and that places them in an ideal position to arrange relevant study visits and seminars for partner groups.

The aims of the WiE project were:

- Ø for women to learn new and innovative ways of how to support business start-up, growth and sustainability;
- Ø to encourage women led micro businesses to explore opportunities for doing business in a wider geographical context;

- Ø to learn from best practices, to become more competitive especially in the current financial climate;
- Ø to engage women who do not normally engage in these types of activities, to take part in a trans-national study.

The sharing of skills and knowledge will be a two way process, showcasing the best of what the region has to offer; learning about best practices from other EU partners; learning through targeted structured visits and seminars from like-minded businesswomen.

The increased self-confidence, enhanced skills and personal development of the women participating will also facilitate development of sustainable businesses. The knowledge and experience gained by them can be passed on to other women entrepreneurs as women are naturally adept at networking.

The project will encourage micro businesses to see themselves as part of an EU economy and not just the local economy, and will allow women to see that the problems for women starting a business are very similar in other parts of Europe. It is also hoped that collaborative/inter-trading activities working between business owners across the EU borders will also take place.

Learning Acquired

Equality

Sweden boasts equality amongst men and women and is ranked amongst the top 5 countries in the world where the equality gap between men and women is the narrowest.

This was quite apparent whilst visiting businesses of all sizes, although Sweden is still working on this equality when it came to large corporates.

The Swedish study visit was specifically designed to look at the environment for women looking to start or grow a business.

What was quite apparent in Sweden; was the foundations that were firmly in place to aid initiatives to stimulate an entrepreneurial culture.

Sweden has a number of initiatives that entice individuals to start a business, throughout their lifetime. One such initiative involves working with undergraduates during their second year to stimulate an entrepreneurial culture whilst still studying - allowing students to try running a business alongside their studies. Comparatively, in the UK initiatives start after the students have completed studies. Their counterparts in Sweden have already experienced the enterprise culture and at the end of their studies they are either at a stage where they have a business that they can move forward full time, or know that it is not for them.

Family Support

As a direct consequence of the equality in Sweden there appears to be a strong support mechanism from family structures (fathers supporting and encouraging daughters) to start and run their own businesses, which included financial, practical as well as moral support.

Childcare

Sweden has an excellent childcare infrastructure which makes childcare a non-issue for women considering starting a business. Childcare still remains an obstacle for women wishing to start up in business in the UK.

Outcomes

Here are some of the comments from participants of Swedish study visit 2011.

I thoroughly enjoyed the trip - had a fantastic time - and I think it will have a real impact on my business because it's changed the way I think about it and given me confidence to try new things - *Sue Christian*

I have had an email from a Gift supplier in Sweden asking if I would like to stock their products so they are on the ball.

Well so far I have lots of outcomes from my study visit. I am in the process of setting up my shipping so I can start to sell globally. I am about to order from a Swedish supplier. I have sorted out my store room so I can start to get lots more stock and my packing room is much more inspiring (as per all the Swedish places we visited...well most of them). Plus I am starting to be more risky rather than thinking like an accountant.

I have now officially gone global. Yep I had my first order from America today. Today Gobowen, tomorrow the world!! - *Barbara Steadman*

I had a great time. This trip was a milestone for me in terms of travelling outside the family comfort-zone and you all contributed to making this an amazing, unforgettable experience. My motto now is: I'll fly anywhere.com!

I will implement new learning in the field of Health and Safety when I return to the UK, updating our current training presentations, using examples of good and bad practices. - *Theresa Jones*

Some of the many ideas and new knowledge gained, key ones that I will incorporate on my return to the UK is:

- to enhance my business mentoring and coaching technique to really maximise the positive impact that a good business support professional has on pre-starts of new businesses;
- cascading my experience to other business support professional in terms of their

impact on pre-start businesses (and other pre-start trainers to ensure they are also aware and build into their own training and delivery a 'can-do' attitude). - *Yvonne Nolan*

I presented to the local WiRE group. I handed out the Ka Vai speed networking sheet and talked about the Ka Vai networking experience.

The talk was very well received with some feedback on WIRE facebook page, another network leader took away the speed networking idea to utilise at her meetings.

I am also planning to contact with the Paivi Gustaffasson, a local garden designer I met and are looking into the possibility of her having a working visit to the UK. - *Joyce Bullock*

I saw best practice in museum education and bought examples of museum education media which I will use in my training and mentoring of women working in museum and heritage. - *Marion Blockley*

The learning from women's network in Sweden is a best practice that can be implemented back in the UK. We have many networks addressing different industries; gender's and formats in the UK. Network in Sweden addresses the current issues of lack of hands on support combined with traditional networking. This is something we can use to update our training to women entrepreneurs and also disseminate to other networks. - *Yasmin Akhtar*

I learnt a great deal on my visit including what an incubator is (and no it's not just for rearing chickens in), an app is information you can pick up on your phone and a social enterprise is not a party!

You will all be pleased to know I am planning to buy a laptop and set up my own Facebook account. - *Jane Bebbington*

Conclusion

The European Union Leonardo programme supports life-long learning. Lessons learned from the Swedish study visit will help participants to enhance their current training plan and delivery.

There are more similarities than differences between UK and Swedish entrepreneurs.

Sweden has very good training programmes and initiatives to support and stimulate enterprise. There are no grants and very little hand-holding support. So what is the secret behind the success of these entrepreneurs?

What clearly stood out whilst talking to businesswomen in Sweden was the strong foundation that where firmly in place from an early age to ensure there was gender equality. Girls are encouraged to follow their dreams. Great initiatives in universities aimed at undergraduates to encourage women to start a business are greatly supported; therefore undergraduates were setting up and running businesses whilst studying; allowing them this time to see if this is a way forward for them before completing their studies, whereas in the UK the emphasis is an after-thought.

Although barriers for women and men still exist for those wishing to start up in business in Sweden; the support, the encouragement and planting of the seed at an earlier age provides a firm foundation for individuals to start-up in Sweden. Could this be the secret behind their success?

There were very strong family supports structures in place for those we met, supporting individuals financially as well as practically to start a business.

Sweden also has very strong childcare provisions which are subsidised by the government, providing women with peace of mind and a well-established structure which takes away the worry about childcare.

Sweden has also recently started up night-care initiative allowing women to do night shifts if they wish, ensuring they are no obstacles to employment.

These subtle and yet very integral points provides entrepreneurs in Sweden the opportunity to take the first step in the world of business and employment.

In the UK a vast amount of money has been invested to stimulate an entrepreneurial culture; yet the environment for starting a business still remains uneven for women compared to men. Childcare still remains a great barrier.

In order to truly develop and promote an entrepreneurial culture amongst women it is imperative that a level playing field is set.

Sweden has a thriving environment that ensures that there is a level playing field for women wishing to start a business; combined with the mind-set that society and women in particular have about equal expectations from both genders to breed success.

The UK participants of the Swedish study visit all came from wide range of industries, all experts in their field. The study visit supported each one to update their training and personal development.

Learning will also be disseminated through various networks ensuring that good practices are highlighted and shared amongst wider community.

A platform providing a continued dialogue through Go-Woman! Connect (www.go-woman.com/gwconnect) will allow study visit participants and the wider community to make contacts, share good practices and do business across borders.

Study Programme

Study Programme – Day 1 (Presentations)



2 Core, Gunilla Remneland (www.edcs.se)

2Core develops and implements projects in cooperation with local and regional government councils and other private and public organisations.

As a member of NRC – National Resource Centre for Women – they focus on entrepreneurship, leadership and management issues.

2Core is active in many networks and that placed them in an ideal position to arrange relevant study visits and seminars for the Swedish study visit 2011.

Västra Götalandsregionen, Marianne Gustafsson

www.vgregion.se

Presentation from Marianne on the Västra region. Västra Götaland County is a county or *län* on the western coast of Sweden.



The county is the second largest (in terms of population) of Sweden's counties and it is subdivided into 49 municipalities (*kommuner*). Its population of 1,550,000 amounts to 17% of Sweden's population. The capital and governmental seat of Västra Götaland County is Gothenburg.

The county has a leading position in Sweden in the production of food forest raw materials and fisheries. It has more acreage, more farms and more cattle than any other Swedish county. Half of the area is covered by forest with almost a tenth of Sweden's annual felling taking place here. Most of the forests are privately owned.



Almi Företagspartner - Tony Abi Khalul (www.almi.se)

Provide opportunities for all viable ideas and companies to develop. Almi provide funding and advice.

ALMI Business Partner AB is owned by the state and is the parent company

of a group of 19 companies - 17 regional subsidiaries plus Almi Invest AB and IFS Consulting AB.



Drivhuset - Linnea Söderling (www.drivhuset.se)

Linnea, who was genuinely enthusiastic about the Drivhuset project which specially works with undergraduates to stimulate enterprise culture.

An initiative that teaches students to 'have a go' at starting and running an enterprise whilst studying;

Once the students have completed their studies they have had the opportunity to 'try' running a business and will have an opportunity of employment or to see if the enterprise would work.

Nyföretagarcentrum, Lena Tilstam (www.nyforetagarcentrum.se)

Since 1985, NyföretagarCentrum has worked hard to stimulate the start of more new companies in Sweden.



Advisors who have personal experience from the business world operationally lead each Enterprise Agency. Most of them are, or have been, self-employed. In addition a broad network of local experts from different branches of business is at hand for support. An advisor at an Enterprise Agency evaluates the business idea, personal qualifications, the potential market, supports the creation of a market plan, goes through economic calculations and budgets, evaluates investment requirements and financing, goes through legal issues, insurance and formal requirements – and, finally, helps out with contacts through relevant networks.

Every year about 15,000 individuals come for advice. It is vital that more companies start but the overriding issue is that they successfully survive. Only 1% (or actually 0,67%) of companies having started via a NyföretagarCentrum go bankrupt after three years – with 82% still being active.



GSP, Incubator, Idetrampolin, Kenneth Ahlfelt

University incubator supporting new knowledge based ventures providing unique conditions for rapid and successful market introduction and establishment.

Study Programme – Day 2 (Food Industry)



Tibro, Syster Yster

Lovely small café in an old building alongside a railway in a Swedish equivalent of a 'listed building' run by two sisters. The two sisters, both with professional backgrounds (a social worker and a bar tender) decided to give them up to pursue their dream.

Running successfully for three years, strongly supported by their family they have created a very successful business with a great potential for growth.

Butik Rustik, Hjo

Set up by two friends; a graphic designer and a furniture designer who decided they wanted to be their own boss. Set in an old 1920's building they sell unique arts and crafts.



Having realised they couldn't fill the shop with just their own work, they now work in collaboration with small businesses on a commission basis.



Njuta, Hjo

Malin, who can only be described as a serial entrepreneur runs a chocolate and coffee shop. Njuta sells high quality chocolates.

Malin and her husband have also opened up an ice-cream parlor. With their businesses being very seasonal, Malin is always thinking of ways to diversify. An inspirational businesswoman indeed!



Study Programme – Day 3 (Networks)



Gothia Science Park, Ann-Karin Hallgren

As a head of PR at Swedish university of Agriculture, Anna relived her career and shared her experience on working in a “men’s world”.

Bia Resource Center, Parkstugan

Bia started 50 years ago. The Resource centre is available to women of all ages from different backgrounds who seek greater opportunities for themselves to get work, entrepreneurship and social skills.



Bia women work with women who have been entrepreneurs in their own countries.



KAVAI Network (www.kavai.se)

Kavai is a women's network that works to create more business. Its members come from different types of activities and have one thing in common: ‘We want to work together to develop our business, business ideas and projects’. They meet once a month and have structured meetings.

Networking the KAVAI way!



Joyce trying out one of the handmade designs



Study Programme – Day 4 (Lidköping)



Rörstrandshuset, Picnic Communication

Picnic are a small web and advertising agency. Having converted a run-down site into what are now impressive offices, picnic live and breathe communication.

Kinnekullegården, Erika Ekesbo

Erika is a business coach is also working with Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF).

Erike is one of 30 coaches working to persuade the farmers to diversify their farming business in order to become sustainable.



Lotten Svensson, Lotten Communication

A lecturer and a great humanitarian, the multi-talented Lotten has the fire and determination we have seen amongst the Swedish women.

Lotten is a great inspiration, a warm individual who shared her experiences and opened her home to strangers.



Study Programme – Day 5 (Karlsborg)



Karlsborg, Laminto

Laminating company run by two sisters in an industry that is predominately occupied by men. Hannah and Maria (ex-bar tender and petrol station worker) run a very specific business with only two more of its kind in Sweden (both of those owned by men).

Laminto has been running for over 13 years. With little help from external agencies, the sisters have grown the business from producing 64 pieces a day to over 6000 a day!

Karlsborg, Idas Brygga

Ann-Louise is an inspirational serial entrepreneur running multiple businesses. Ann-Louise runs a high class restaurant serving the most exquisite fish and a hotel that showcases rooms of the highest standards.



Ann-Louise is a woman of multiple talents and has big goals for the future.



Our gracious host for the day Susanne Böttiger with Ann-Louise Wagg



The delegates at the Göta Canal

The delegates outside Idas Brygga's restaurant



Yasmin Akhtar, Susanne Böttiger and Gunilla Remneland



Study Programme - Cultural Experience



Appendix I - UK Participants



Barbara Steadman - Another Gorgeous Day

Email: info@anothergorgeousday.co.uk

Website: www.anothergorgeousday.co.uk

Another Gorgeous Day is an online store all about words. We sell a wide range of quality gifts, home accessories and journals, all with meaningful words, sayings or quotes inscribed on them. We pride ourselves on making your shopping experience pleasurable. From the look, feel and ease of the website, the wonderful words on our gorgeous products, through to our personal service we ensure our customers have a memorable time visiting our gorgeous shop.

Our store was established in 2009 and is going from strength to strength. Our range is increasing all the time as we seek out more and more lovely products with words. A gift with words means so much more.

So say it with words and I hope you or someone you care about has another gorgeous day...



Hannah Reynolds - Mischievous Marketing Limited

Email: Hannah@mischievousmarketing.co.uk

Website: www.mischievousmarketing.co.uk

If you are in the early stages of running your business and want your professionalism to be demonstrated in your marketing materials and a well-thought-through marketing activity plan Mischievous Marketing will work closely with you to make this happen.

Reinvigorate

If you have a successful business that has grown without any formal marketing and you feel now is the right time to get a marketing plan in place to take the business forward then Mischievous Marketing can capitalise on all the good work you have done to create a practical marketing activity plan to take your business to the next level.

Showtime

Mischievous Marketing is commissioned to undertake special projects which have included:

- * Bringing new and innovative products to market
- * Research new markets for existing products
- * Working creatively with existing staff to help them engage with the brand and sell more
- * Creative input into existing marketing activities.





Jane Bebbington - Dearnford Lake

Email: jane@dearnford.com

Website: www.dearnford.com

Private event venue for hosting, Civil Ceremonies, Wedding receptions, Corporate events, training and education days, business meetings, Country sports, Flyfishing and Hot-Air Balloon Launches.

We also host celebrations and Charity events and Car Boot Collectors fairs on a regular basis.



Jane O'Connor - Opening Doors to All Ltd

Email: jane@openingdoors-uk.co.uk

Website: www.openingdoors-uk.co.uk/

We undertake disability access audits, deliver disability awareness training and undertake any disability related building requirements.

We are also hoping to expand the business into the manufacturing of disability equipment that fits into the modern day environment and lifestyle.



Joyce Bullock - Insight Design Consultancy

Email: info@insightdesignconsultancy.co.uk

Website: www.insightdesignconsultancy.co.uk

Garden design and horticultural consultancy, expanded to include tuition and workshop facilitation. Working primarily with domestic clients; Insight Design offer a complete service, from design through to finished garden, including all project management, full construction, lighting, water features and planting schemes.

Workshops and tuition covers a wide subject range: gardening, 'grow your own', buying local, cooking with fresh ingredients, supporting wildlife, country crafts, willow work etc. to a varied demographic group.

Classes and workshops have been delivered to gardening groups, young Mums, people with learning difficulties, children with learning difficulties, adults with mental health illness, elderly, Mums & toddlers.





Margaret Gray - Midwest Rural Enterprise; Community Interest Company

Email: margaretg@midwest-rural.org.uk

Website: www.midwest-rural.org.uk

Midwest Rural Enterprise is a Community Interest Company offering Business Support to Social Enterprise, Start-ups and SME's.

We have a team of trained volunteer business mentors. We deliver a range of bespoke management development programmes to social enterprise and the private and public sector. We currently deliver the Business Link programme in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Social Enterprise in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

We established Women in Social Enterprise (WISE) to offer peer support and networking opportunities to women in the sector. We organise a "Women's Enterprise" conference as part of enterprise week. This was the conferences 6th Year.

We have Prowess flagship status and are a member of the national Federation of Enterprise Agencies (NFEA), we hold the Social Enterprise Charter Mark and ISO 9001.

We are members of local women's business networks and encourage our female clients to join these networks to gain personal and business support.



Marion Blockley - Heritage Management

Email: mail@marionblockley.co.uk

Website: www.marionblockley.co.uk

I am an archaeologist, interpretive planner and heritage consultant, with 30 years' experience mentoring and training museum staff, heritage site owners and managers, and community groups. My key areas of work involve caring for sites to preserve them for future generations and telling their stories in an interesting and engaging way to a wide range of different audiences. This may include local residents and school children and visitors from overseas.

A particular interest is helping local communities gain the most from their sites and cultural history and helping them to plan how to derive a regular and sustainable income from them. I have been involved in professional heritage training, mentoring and skills development for more than 20 years.





Sue Christian - Sue Christian Handweaver

Email: admin@suechristianhandweaver.co.uk

Website: www.suechristianhandweaver.co.uk

I design and create hand-woven textiles, both wearable's such a scarves and shawls, and domestic such as linen towels.

At present I sell mainly at high-end designer/maker fairs where a very high standard of work is maintained. I am hoping to have work accepted into a small number of quality galleries.



Theresa Jones - Manor Services Limited

Email: theresa@manorservices.co.uk

Manor Services Limited offers training and development opportunities to forward thinking individuals either employed looking to up-skill or those seeking employment. Training is delivered either in the workplace or in a range of selected, fully equipped training suites.

Manor Services Limited is a registered Training Centre with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, and is also licensed to deliver Institution of Safety and Health courses (IOSH). The training and development opportunities we have to offer are varied and include accredited vocational training in Health and Safety, Environmental Management, Food Safety, Self Employment, Customer Care, Administration, I.T. and a range of Employer Engagement courses.

We also offer a wide variety of National Vocational Qualifications (QCF) via our Centre's awarding body: OCR.



Yasmin Akhtar - Go-Woman! Limited

Email: gowoman@go-woman.com

Website: www.go-woman.com

Go Woman! provides support to women who may be thinking of or who are running their own enterprise. They specialise in projects working with women from underprivileged backgrounds and manage EU funded projects exchanging knowledge and experience between women entrepreneurs and those engaged in women's enterprise support across Europe.

Go-Woman! magazine is a quarterly publication, full of inspiring and useful information on starting and growing a business.

Go-Woman! services include project management at local and European level as well as web services.





Yvonne Nolan - MET Solutions

Email: yvonnenolan@met-solutions.co.uk

Website: www.met-solutions.co.uk

MET Solutions delivers tailored marketing, event management and training services to organisations across the public and private sectors. But it's how those services are delivered that makes this business unique. Bringing more than twenty years' commercial experience, Yvonne Nolan founded MET Solutions with a single goal: to provide a wholly professional and personal service tailored to the exact needs of every client.

That means taking the time to get to know each client, their organisation and their particular requirements. It means working closely with them in an atmosphere of honesty, openness and trust. It means taking a flexible, proactive and highly practical approach that goes beyond the initial brief to add real value.

That approach has seen MET Solutions grow as Yvonne has built a portfolio of satisfied clients. In fact, much of MET's work comes from repeat business as clients increasingly see Yvonne as more than a supplier, but a close and valued business partner.

"Above all, you've got to have a passion for what you do. And a determination that everything you deliver brings tangible positive results for every client."

