

## **Second Life Shop Forest Row**

Progress Report to the Parish Council's Community Services Committee

By FrowResource CIC

November, 2022

At the meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022 the Parish Council approved a grant of £8000 and a loan of £9500 to Frow Resource CIC in order to enable a shop in the village to be opened which by selling donated clothes and other goods would reduce waste, provide local employment and volunteering opportunities, and provide funds to support other local recycling initiatives.

In April 2022 a lease was secured on 14-15 Hartfield Road -the former Taffels café- and conversion work began. We opened the shop on 9<sup>th</sup> June, having recruited two shop staff (equal to one full-time post), Alexandra Mathie and Naomi Phitidis. They have been capable and enthusiastic and have created a very welcoming atmosphere supported by a large number of volunteers.

### **Financials**

Shop sales for the five months of opening have been very encouraging and we are at breakeven point (income equal outcome). Whilst our bank balance is healthy, we are aware that the future is uncertain and we are building a reserve equal to three months of fixed costs in order to ensure that we can cover any eventualities.

The business plan presented to the parish council earlier in the year showed financial projections with three different scenarios. Since opening Second Life, financial reports show that our performance to date fits with the *realistic scenario*.

We have incurred setup costs of some £7000, slightly more than we had forecast because of unexpected electrical problems. The £8000 grant has been immensely valuable to us in helping us cope with these costs.

With regard to repayment of the £9500 loan, we are confident that we shall be able to provide for this, whether by operational surpluses or by obtaining grant funding from other sources. We would like to start planning to repay the loan after at least one year of trading so that we feel we understand the ins and outs of the project.

Our long-term aim is to re-invest all money into reducing waste in Forest Row at the same time as we feed our local economy and reinvest in our community. We are working on ensuring strong communication with residents so that everyone knows how the money is used.

### **Measurables**

The shop has received huge quantities of great quality donations from the community. In the initial months the sheer scale has been overwhelming and the challenge has been to build processes to move donations on, whilst keeping to our ethical brief. Helpful procedures are being put in place and we have been weighing all donations since the end of August. We have received **over 2000 kilos** of donations since then.

## Community Outreach

The shop has been a hub of activity since opening, with people volunteering, providing positive feedback, requesting specific items and offers of help.

- **Ukrainian Refugee Help:** From day one the shop has given free clothes and product to our Ukrainian families in Forest Row and the surrounding Parishes. We do this sensitively and with dignity.
- **Further Refugee Help:** We are also giving winter clothes to other charities that help refugees in the UK.
- **Winter 2022-23:** Frow Resource are keen to help the community keep warm this winter – we are working on a campaign that will request blankets, hot water bottles, thermal underwear, jumpers, etc. which will then be passed on to people who need them.

## Volunteers

We currently have over 45 signed up volunteers who offer their time to work in the shop, and the number increases weekly. We are working on a campaign to increase communication on how the experience of volunteering at the shop increases wellbeing and offers a sense of belonging, community, and purpose. We recently attended the Wellbeing event on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November to begin this outreach.

We are in the process of getting DBS certification for both of the Shop Managers to be able to have under 16 year old volunteers (e.g. sixth form students looking to improve their CVs).

## Third-Party Collaborations with community and national partners

Part of Second Life's strategy is to create a rich network of environmentally aware third-party partners to assist us in moving donations that don't sell through the shop, whether they be broken, stained, torn, etc. This process has begun in earnest and we have spent much time researching on the ethical stance of our partners to ensure they meet our ethos or upcycling, repurposing, rehousing and avoiding our community's waste from going into landfill or being incinerated. Examples of these third-party partners include a company that turns 'rag' into industrial products and doesn't send the product overseas; and another company that pays per kilo and can remove large amounts of rag and clothes that we are unable to sell. To date, we have disposed of 200kg through these partnerships.

We have set up a business account on **ebay** to sell vintage clothes and other items of value – this initiative is a trial at present and it is run by a volunteer. We are actively finding recycling or upcycling routes for increasing numbers of product lines. For example:

**Books:** Donations of books are significant. We have developed processes to sell them through the shop or, alternatively, sell them through other online outlets, and donate them. Books (and cardboard) that don't sell at all (after being offered for free) go to a local company that shreds them for animal bedding.

**Bric-a-brac:** We are currently working to set up a process by which local auctioneers will take boxed batches of unsold bric-a-brac. This will be started this month.

**Precious Metals:** Valued by a local valuer and are then put into auction to raise the most money for the community.

**Blister Packs:** We collect these in the shop and take them to Superdrug in Haywards Heath.

**Batteries:** We have a collection box for used batteries that are then sent away for recycling.

**Prescription Glasses:** We have a bin to collect unwanted glasses, which are passed onto a charity that meets the need for glasses overseas.

**Toys:** Unsold hard plastic toys are recycled through a partner.

**Baby Clothes:** We send baby clothes that don't sell in the shop to a charity – Ten Little Toes - that donates clothes to parents in need.

**Absorbent Cloth:** t-shirts and clothes made from cotton that are stained, torn or not sellable are sorted and cut into large squares, which are sold on a per kilo basis to local mechanics and businesses that need rag. This initiative shows the very beginning of a wider strategy to create micro-businesses in the community.

**Upcycled Product:** We have a star volunteer (our Landlady), who produces cleaning cloths and scrubs from unsold cloth, plus significant upcycled products – can be seen in our November window display. We also have a number of volunteers who take unsold jumble/rag from us for free and turn it into a usable product i.e. bags, hair scrunchies for us to resell – this is a new and growing initiative.

**Free unsold donations:** Every day we offer unsold donations (e.g. old books, games, home ware etc.) for free on our patio – this is proving popular.

**Jumble Sales:** when clothing has been in the shop for a few weeks and not been sold, we put it into a jumble sale that runs monthly. People purchase a bagful for £4 a kilo – this has been very popular. The last jumble sale rehoused 71 kilos

**Jam Jar:** We have a free Jam Jar swap that sits on the patio for people to give and take as they choose.