

Commercial in Confidence

Leeds (South) Methodist Circuit

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Date: 19 March 2004

**On behalf of
YORKSHIRE & HUMBERSIDE ASSESSMENT LTD**

Assessor: Stephen Hudson

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGANISATION

Leeds (South) Methodist Circuit is part of the Leeds District. It is the Circuit which has been using the *Vision into Reality* process to work towards achievement of the Investors in People Standard and not the individual churches. The Circuit's role is primarily strategic although this includes providing general support including training and development for volunteers.

The main activities of the Circuit include, strategic planning, conducting church services, pastoral visiting, finance & administration, property maintenance, as well as outreach work with children and young people. The planning and delivery of community services may be in partnership with other organisations, such as The Boys Brigade, where appropriate.

Pressures of downsizing, inadequate long term funding, changes in the local communities of South Leeds and in the staffing, membership and age composition of the Circuit were highlighted at the outset of *Vision into Reality* as key issues for the management of change. The vision to improve communication between team members and volunteers of the strategic and support role has helped to promote better teamwork, encourage comment and feedback as well as to promote development, closer measurement of objectives and evaluation.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

The objective of the initial assessment was to establish to what extent the organisation meets the requirements of the Investors in People Standard. Feedback was also sought on the issues of communication and the support and empowerment of members to encourage teamwork throughout the Circuit, without causing role and training overload. (In particular for volunteers)

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Documentary evidence provided included Action Plans, Circuit Survey Results, Circuit Leadership Team Minutes, Circuit Meeting Agenda Minutes and Circuit Directory 2003. The assessor was also invited to "sit in" on a Circuit Leadership Team meeting. As part of the assessment process 5 of the 7 sites were visited. Eleven people were interviewed in face to face meetings, either individually or in pairs, with one written testimonial also received. A number of informal discussions complemented the assessment process, concluding with feedback on the evening of March 2004 which was also attended by the LSC Adviser.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The assessor identified sufficient evidence to recommend to the Yorkshire & Humberside Recognition Panel that Leeds (South) Methodist Circuit be recognised as an Investor in People.

As the interview sample included the three Ministers, a Local Preacher, Personnel Officer, members of the Leadership Team of Church Stewards and Circuit Officers the findings gave fair representative feedback of the facts and feelings of the *Vision into Reality* journey so far. The staff and volunteers

were unanimous in the view that the Investors framework had helped them to think more clearly, put plans into action and improved communication and teamwork. The Circuit has now also built a platform of ideas through surveys and use of e-mail/website which captured the interest of their individual church congregations. The new bank of volunteers will be followed up by the Church Stewards so that new knowledge, skills and volunteers can be utilised for the benefit of the communities of South Leeds.

FINDINGS AGAINST THE ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES

An Investor in People is fully committed to developing its people in order to achieve its aims and objectives

A number of strategies were described which are in place to support the development of people. These included Away Days, Conferences, Summer Schools, Internal Workshops, Accompanied Self-Appraisal, Skills Audits and provision of Teaching/Learning materials. The Ministers are also encouraging more opportunities for shared worship across the church circuit. Information about roles and offices has been provided with surveys used to enable more volunteers to come forward. This should enable people to accept roles and develop themselves as well as improve the circuit through sharing the “workload.” The interviews confirmed how effective the workshops had been for Local Preachers, Worship Leaders and Church Stewards. Everyone felt supported in their role, spiritual development, friendships and sense of community.

Examples were given of performance improvement through attendance of the internal workshops, better use of e-mail and cross - church cooperation. The Ministers, with the support of the Leadership Team have begun the process of prioritising their own roles and specialist areas of expertise. This will allow the team to work “smarter” as time restraints and role overload means none of the team can possibly work any “harder.” The sharing of information, mutual support and encouragement, whilst always present within the circuit team has been strengthened through the feeling of togetherness as a result of *Vision into Reality*.

People interviewed know that their contribution is recognised. Whilst they do not actively seek praise and recognition, as they “do the job because they want to do it” there is adequate support and feedback, mainly through informal channels. The common message throughout the assessment process was that “the Ministers are there for us when we need them” and that the strong friendships and Christian faith were “the glue that holds everything together.” The assessor could also see that every effort is being made to improve the recognition process. Volunteers often serve a full term of 6 years before the 1 year break which is a huge commitment in terms of time and energy.

The Investors framework has focused the minds of the Circuit to ensure equality of opportunity in the development of people. Circuit meetings have considered the make up of their own meetings in terms of gender, age and race. The goals, to enable more people to join in the life of the circuit at every level, role sharing and people development, in general, have been discussed. Managers have delivered internal workshops, open to all volunteers, in subjects such as “How to be a Steward”, “Readers

training” and general education about the various roles and responsibilities. The theme of "include, enable and encourage” came across well with no doubt in people’s minds that equality of opportunity is part of the ethos of Leeds (South) Methodist Circuit.

Areas of improvement for consideration

- Maintain continuous recognition and support, perhaps through further development of supervision or appraisal type meetings which affirm clarity of roles and accountabilities
- Push ahead with the plan to develop your own Circuit Newsletter which should help to build the cross-church team, sharing of facilities, information, internal workshops and seminars

PLANNING

An Investor in People is clear about its aims and its objectives and what its people need to do to achieve them

The Mission and *Vision into Reality* priority areas have evolved into a clear Action Plan with everyone aware of the drive to build up and encourage the skills and contribution of all church members and officers. Through use of questionnaires, surveys, e-mail and news sheets the aims and objectives have been shared with the Leeds South Methodist Community. It is only the Staff, Circuit Stewards and Officers who have a direct responsibility for achieving the Circuit’s aims and objectives, though members of the Circuit Leadership Team and Circuit Meeting help to set the goals and evaluate the outcomes. The defining of roles and responsibilities under the broad aims of worship, support, serving the community, learning and skills is encouraging further consultation, survey follow up and active member involvement.

As already stated formal support and development has been stimulated as a result of using the Investors framework with a number of internal workshops delivered in support of the worship and spiritual development aims. People had attended the workshops, for example Stewards and Pastoral Visitors, with generally very positive feedback. The Circuit is aware of the need not to “overload” people with training and development as the majority are volunteers who need to maintain some sense of work-life balance. The assessment did confirm that people had learned from the development opportunities, feeling more confident that they were maintaining the high standards of worship and pastoral care.

People were all able to understand and explain how they contribute to achieving the organisation’s aims and objectives. People rightly described themselves as “enablers” who supported the work of local church members. People also stated that they now felt “more connected” as a Circuit. They were also proud of some of the recent achievements such as the new “Building Blocks Centre” which the assessor was able to see will be such an asset to the local community.

Areas of improvement for consideration

- As the Circuit make up is primarily volunteers do make every attempt to manage the structure, format and timings of the numerous meetings to allow for good use of time/work-life balance (virtual meetings & website use?)
- There is still scope to rationalise the work of the Ministers and Local Preachers, to encourage teamwork/learning support and so on. This is readily acknowledged and is in progress

ACTION

An Investor in People develops its people effectively in order to improve its performance

“Managers” in the context of your Circuit means anyone from a House Group Leader to a Minister or Circuit Steward. The knowledge, skills, qualifications and empathy of the Ministerial team is ably led by the Superintendent Minister who in turn is guided by the District Minister. Systems and processes are well established for Ministers to maintain and develop their “people” skills. The development of the remaining managers is an on-going process, begun with the internal workshops. Further evaluation of needs and actions remain priorities for 2004. During the assessment mention was also made of the support provided through the District as well as “Connexion” although this was not explained in detail. People interviewed were able to give examples of the support they had been given in their development, including opportunities to “set up Readers services,” attend refresher training and set up new Youth Groups and so on. (Kaleidoscope training was also mentioned in this respect)

The assessment visits confirmed the Induction processes are somewhat mixed, being seen as strong for some roles, with “welcoming services” for new church members being quoted. Most interviewees had been in post for some time and had been given some basic on-the-job type of induction with some shadowing opportunities, feeling this was adequate for their needs. Health & Safety and Risk Assessments are paramount.

Learning and development opportunities appear to be appreciated where they have been recognised as such. The Circuit Leaders meeting was a good example of “business-like” tools and techniques being used, for example “brain-storming.” The qualification and accreditation process for Preachers and Worship Leaders is established with mentorship and formal accreditation as part of the process. The Methodist Church also has some external standards for Church Stewards and Pastoral visitors. People spoke about their transferable skills and business experience. They acknowledged their “ownership” of personal development in areas such as Bible Study, prayer and spiritual growth. As the *Vision* process continues effective learning and development can be measured although some people feel naturally reluctant to bring in too many perceived “management tools and techniques.”

Area of improvement for consideration

- A generic Induction package/welcome booklet should be developed (in time perhaps even a CD Rom version)

EVALUATION

An Investor in People understands the impact of its investment in people on its performance

Improvements were described at individual, team and Circuit levels. The development is already having an impact with people speaking about improving community activities, links with other churches and faiths, although only being in their “infancy.” The feeling of beginning to function more as a team who collectively are encouraging church growth and member involvement is showing through as a performance improvement. Again it is early days as the cycle of planning and review has only just moved into the second year. Certainly people appreciated all of the work so far, speaking about improving communications, more awareness of the issues facing the Circuit as well as clarity within their roles in addressing some of the issues.

People understand the impact of the development of people on performance, having embraced the Investors Standard and *Vision into Reality* process with such enthusiasm and genuine commitment. People at all levels had attended the Vision workshops, been consulted about the Action Plans with most also undertaking development activities including attending meetings and seminars.

People gave several examples of how the organisation gets better at developing its people. The Circuit team were delighted with the level of help and support offered. The training of Local Preachers has been refined and simplified. The refresher courses for Stewards have been well received and attended.

Areas of improvement for consideration

- As the community activities continue to grow it will be important to establish and maintain your links with schools, charities and other such organisations to share good practice
- The Investors Work-life Balance Model may be of interest (www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/IIP/Internet/default.htm)
- Maintain the *Vision into Reality* Network