

The last five years and future priorities

Doing Good Business

The group turnover increased steadily over the last five year period, achieving its target of £8m turnover in 2010/11. However public sector financial constraints in 2011/12 led to a loss of £1.5m worth of contracts. Some of this was recovered, resulting in a group turnover of £7.1m.

The financial position of all of the businesses (with the exception of The Big Issue in the North/Trust), improved year on year, with Aisha and Big Life Employment recovering from negative net assets. By the end of 2011/12 all businesses were in a positive balance sheet position. This can be attributed to improved financial management (recognition of income, management of VAT, control of debtors), securing new contracts and better cost control.

The Big Issue in the North, Aisha Childcare, Big Life Employment and Big Life Centres have steadily marketed their products and services, but need to embed marketing in their business practices.

Big Life Employment, Self Help Services and Open Door have all subcontracted to other providers and Big Life Employment has also acted as a subcontractor. In the next five years we will need to develop our subcontracting infrastructure.

The Big Life Company owns two buildings (Longsight Children's Centre and Stretford Road). The Children's Centre has a 30 year lease on the land it occupies with rights to purchase if the current owner chooses to sell. The ground floor of the Stretford Road building is leased to a day nursery provider and the first floor is The Big Life group HQ. It has an outstanding mortgage of £350k.

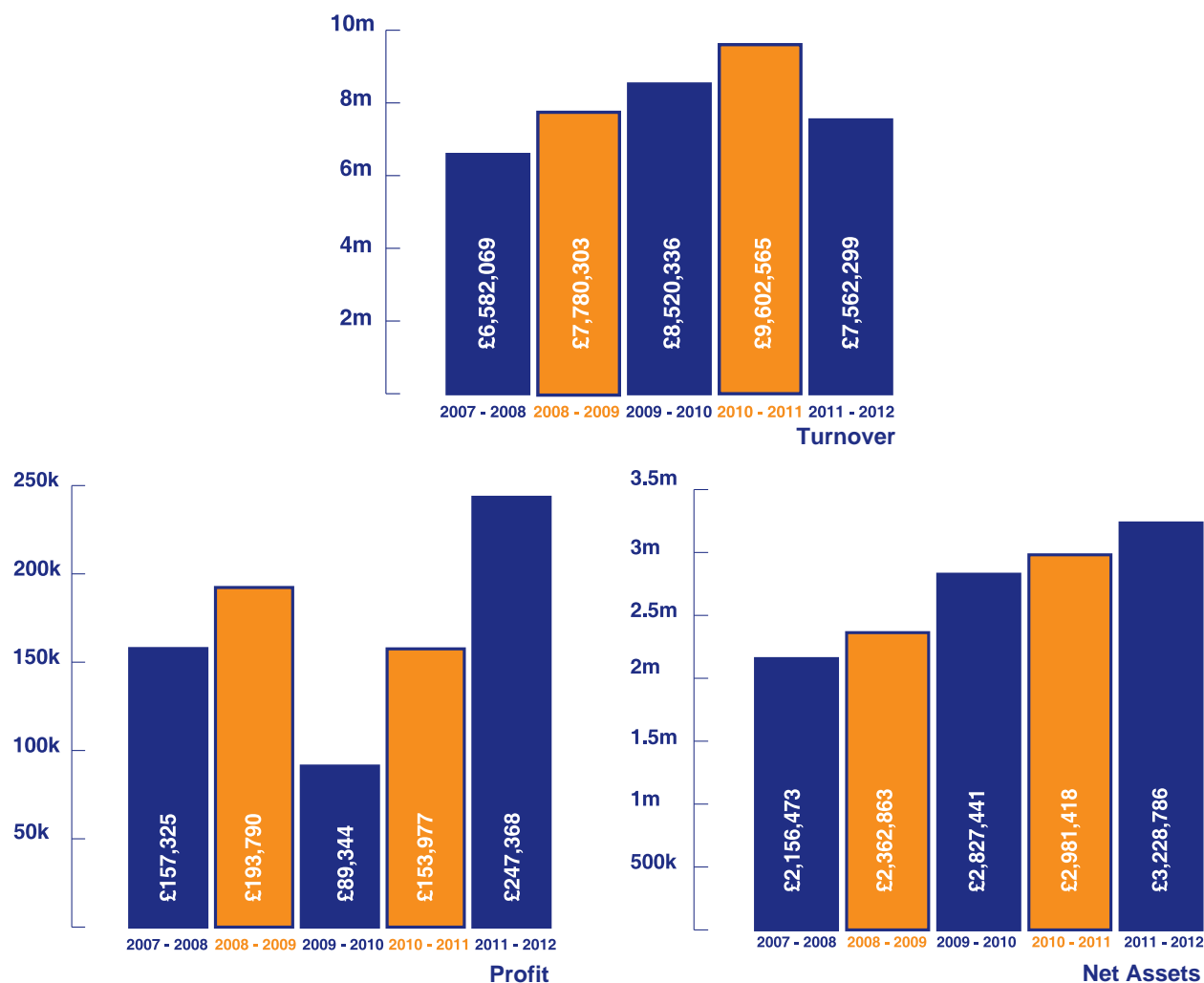
Big Life Centres owns the Zion Centre and contributes to a sinking fund for structural repairs to be carried out by the head lease holder. However, due to mergers and transfers, the head lease has never operated according to the agreement and as the building is now ten years old, major repairs will soon be required. Big Life Centres also owns

the Big Boat, which was purpose built in 2009. Big Life Centres is required to deliver a number of health and well being activities on the Boat for five years.

The Big Issue in the North Trust owned two buildings (Leeds and Manchester) which were sold in 2007 and 2010 respectively. The Big Issue in the North Trust currently retains cash from these sales for future investment.

Since it was set up, the structure of the group has resulted in management fees and other recharges across the group which incur VAT. In addition only The Big Life Company, Big Life Employment, Aisha Childcare and Open Door produced consolidated accounts. A review of the group structure with the Auditors and Lawyers in 2011, suggested a more streamlined group structure to reduce VAT costs and provide the businesses with competitive advantage through the provision of individual and consolidated accounts.





In the next five years we will:

- Further improve our **financial systems** by providing managers with greater access to real time financial information and electronic banking. We will reduce reliance on paper based systems and reduce duplication of processes between the finance team and operational staff.
- Secure new forms of **investment**.
- Develop an **asset management plan** to ensure that our resources are invested and protected. We will ensure that building assets are maintained to ensure they continue to provide high quality environments.
- Embed **marketing** in business procedures.
- Develop an **infrastructure for sub-contracts**.
- Double our **group turnover** to £16m by 2017, achieving a profit of 5% of turnover per annum. We will grow our cash assets to reduce reliance on bank facilities
- Streamline the group structure to make it more **tax efficient** and provide competitive advantage through larger consolidated accounts.

* Figures correct as of March 2012

Improving What We Do

During the last five years considerable focus has been given to improving staff commitment to The Big Life group. Investors in People accreditation was secured in 2010. A new Vision and Values training course and a group induction course was developed. A well being policy was also introduced. Personal and Organisational development courses continued to be delivered to develop a culture of empowerment and self-efficacy. A new Sickness Absence procedure was introduced to ensure that staff were accountable. The appraisal process was reviewed and a new capability procedure introduced to tighten up on performance management. Finally in 2010/11 a new course was introduced for all managers to ensure that they had a sound understanding of policies and procedures. As a result of these changes, the staff survey and monitoring statistics show consistently high levels of satisfaction (see graphs, right).

In 2010/11, following the loss of public sector contracts across the group, many staff were involved in redundancy consultations and this resulted in just 37% of staff feeling secure in keeping their employment. Although this improved slightly in 2011, it is still well below the previous levels of 70%.

In 2010 an audit of mandatory training was undertaken which showed low levels of compliance. This was exacerbated by confusion over what was mandatory for whom, how often, and poor record keeping. Health and Safety training was monitored separately and achieved better compliance. After a concerted focus, compliance with mandatory training improved to 70% in 2012

A new HR database was introduced in 2009, and this dramatically reduced paperwork and duplication. It provided more accurate records of supervision, appraisals, terms and conditions and absence. However, it was costly to update and its storage capacity limited. The external HR legal support was recommissioned twice over this period, with satisfaction increasing considerably in 2011/12.

External IT support was commissioned in 2008 and remote access introduced through a Citrix system. This led to increasing levels of staff satisfaction with their IT equipment and support. Information Governance policies and procedures were improved to align with NHS standards.

In order to cut costs and achieve efficiencies the Executive and Assistant Director team during this period was kept small, and remained relatively stable. Two Finance

Directors left during this period, partly as a result of the particular challenges of this role and also some personal circumstances. Going forward the group will need to ensure that it creates opportunities to grow talent within the group. At the end of 2011 a leadership and culture diagnostic of the leadership team showed a strong homogenous culture, combined with preference for the use of both hard and soft power approaches. The diagnostic indicated that the use of analytical skills could be enhanced within this team.

A new Clinical and Service Governance Board was created as a sub committee of the Board and chaired by a Medical Director. This Board ensured that the services we deliver are safe and high quality, and that staff are appropriately trained and skilled. It receives and reviews quarterly reports on accidents, incidents, comments and complaints, as well as Health and Safety. It provides assurance that trends are identified and lessons learnt. It reviews policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose. Overall it has significantly contributed to providing assurance on the quality of services delivered. Safeguarding, Vulnerable Adults, Information Governance and Health and Safety leads were identified to provide support across the group.

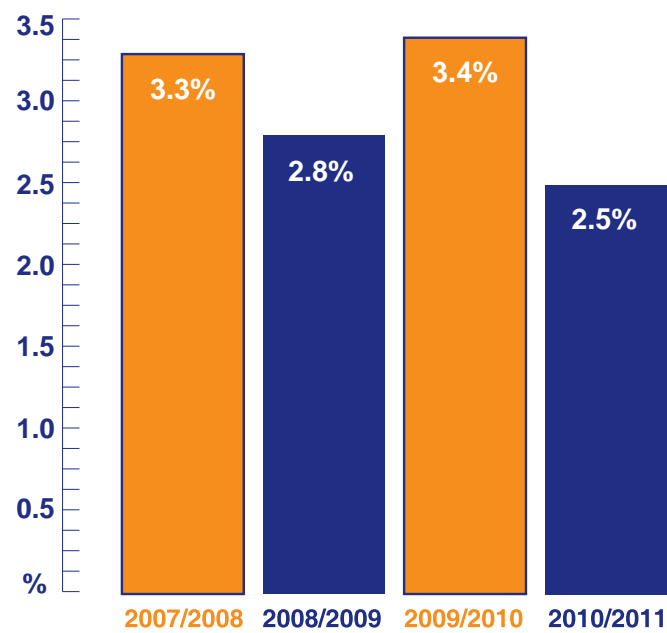
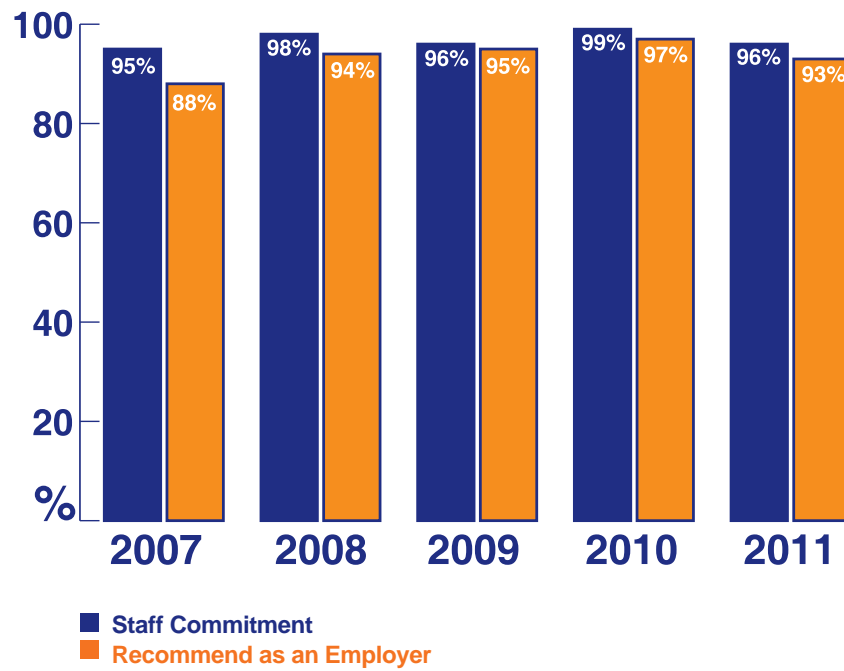
In the next five years we will:

- Introduce a **new HR database** that will provide greater functionality for staff and managers.

- Continue to **refine mandatory training**, introducing more efficient delivery methods and attain 100% compliance across the group.

- Invest in the **development of the leadership team**, ensuring a consistent culture and improved analytical review.

- Improve the number of staff who **feel secure** in keeping their employment from 44% to 70%.



Sickness Absence Rates

Creating Opportunities

Every year between 2007 and 2012, the group exceeded its target for the number of volunteers it employs, reaching an average of 470 volunteers a year. The achievement of Investors in Volunteering accreditation in 2010 supported a continued growth in the number of volunteers. The number of service users also exceeded the annual target over this period, with an average 14,000 people using our services every year, although recording methods were sometimes inconsistent and the measurement of impact on quality of life was difficult to ascertain. In the next five years it is likely that the people we work with will have less opportunities to gain employment and contribute to their communities, and this will remain a key priority.

At the beginning of this five year period, Community Involvement Plans were introduced to ensure all businesses maximised the opportunities for communities and service users. We continue to excel at engaging people in self help initiatives, consultation events, advisory groups and volunteering. However it is clear that whilst new services and initiatives easily attract and engage people in formal overseeing and advisory roles, as services and activities become more established the main form of involvement is through volunteering and feedback surveys/events.

Membership of the Boards of Trustees was expanded to ensure that the Board members encompassed both relevant personal experience, as well as the required skill mix. In the last year the representation of people from BME communities reduced. A service user membership was established for Self Help Services, but following feedback from members (that they wished to be more operationally involved than strategically) this was disbanded and service users were incorporated into an expanded Advisory Group.

The group prides itself in helping people tackle the problems in their lives as a whole and as we grow larger it is important that we do not fall into the trap of silo working.

In the next five years we will:

- Establish a new database for recording the **impact** of our services, ensuring accuracy and consistency of data collected.
- Maximise effective cross-group working by developing a range of services where we are already delivering.
- Renew the **Investors in Volunteering** accreditation.
- Ensure that each business reviews and plans the opportunities for community and user **involvement** as part of its annual business planning process.
- Continually review the membership of the **Boards** to ensure they reflect the communities we work within and have the required skills.
- Introduce new ways of ensuring that the **governance** of the organisation is transparent and accountable.



Influencing

Over this five year period the group has produced an annual Impact Report which summarised all the outcomes from across the group. Its simple to read format meant that it received good feedback from busy commissioners and stakeholders. It was also distributed widely to the public through inclusion as an insert in The Big Issue in the North. However, targeting distribution to key stakeholders was variable.

The group has shared its learning and demonstrated its effectiveness by producing six evaluations but has struggled to collate data in a timely manner meaning evaluations were also often not timely.

In the last five years we have presented at 19 conferences, hosted 17 visits by ministers and MPs (including David Cameron), provided case studies to 23 publications and attended 22 meetings with Ministers and policy makers. The change in government in 2010 required the group to develop new relationships with ministers and MPs, few of whom are based in our delivery areas.

In 2009 we launched a second manifesto to influence parties in the run up to the election. Several of our

recommendations are now reflected in government policy, including introducing a taper to benefit payments (so making it easier for people to access short term and temporary work opportunities), opening up of public services and refocusing children's centres' resources on deprived families. Though it is difficult to identify a direct correlation between the lobbying work of the group and the changes that were made, we are confident that our work played a role. Going forwards there is a need to ensure the impact of this work is measured.

Our relationship management has been tested as a result of the changing commissioning landscape. Businesses have had to build relationships with new commissioners and will need to maintain these relationships in the future. There is a need to better manage our relationships with local and national commissioners and MPs/Ministers and over the next 5 years the group will invest in a Stakeholder management database to support this.

In 2007 we set ourselves the target to increase our brand recognition by commissioners and by 2010, 80% of

commissioners agreed that the group delivers high quality services and 100% rated the group as business-like.

The growth of unemployment and the recession has led to a growing culture of blame and attacks on the people who are worst off in society. In the next five years we will position the group as an expert in the fields in which it works, providing opinion, data and case studies to the media and key decision makers in order to champion the rights of people we work with and influence future policy decisions.

The decline in print media and shift to online media and social networking has been reflected in the group's media coverage, with the number of media hits reducing from 257 in 07/08 to 129 in 11/12. In response The Big Life group began to use social networking tools (facebook and Twitter), and has revamped its websites. Web hits have risen from 24,000 in 07/08 to 86,718 in 11/12. We now need to ensure our sites continue to meet the needs of the people using them, ensuring they are interactive and embrace new technology.

In the next five years we will:

- Introduce an easy to use database for **stakeholder management** for each business.
- Produce **annual impact reports** from each business and a compilation group report.
- Invest in developing **social media** skills and increase our use of interactive web sites, video and tweets.
- Develop our board members as **proactive ambassadors** for the group.