



Top: Azjul with an advisor at City Gateway receiving careers guidance. Photo courtesy of Impetus-PEF.

Bottom: A young person working with a coach at Impetus-PEF partner charity Adviza. Photo courtesy of Adviza.



Are you achieving what you set out to achieve?

Elly de Decker, Investment Director at Impetus – The Private Equity Foundation, has worked with Save the Children and Médecins Sans Frontières. Currently on secondment with the Big Lottery Fund, she challenges organisations to take a good hard look at themselves to ensure they are truly making an impact

Impetus-PEF's mission is to help 11-24 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve their full potential in education and work. How exactly does the organisation go about doing this?

The aim of the organisation is to support disadvantaged young people to improve their life outcomes. We specifically focus on education and the transition from school into work because we see these areas as key building blocks to successful life outcomes.

It's important to pause from time to time and question the status quo. This requires courage from leadership teams because they might find that they're not actually achieving what they set out to achieve, but the results can be really powerful

Since we are not a direct delivery organisation, we partner with organisations, charities and social enterprises that work in the two aforementioned areas, providing them with long term, unrestricted funding, strategic-management support

and pro bono help. We help organisations understand their true impact and challenge them to question who they are actually working for, what they want to achieve and whether their models of intervention are adequate.

How does Impetus-PEF define 'disadvantaged'?

We consider a variety of factors and this question forms part of the conversation we have with our partner organisations. For organisations that focus on young people in school, for example, free school meals will be a key factor. In terms of older age groups, we look at their NEETs status, and consider factors such as whether they receive jobseeker allowance or any other benefit payments.

Very often, organisations are really committed to working with disadvantaged young people, but sometimes they require further help in clarifying the specific selection criteria to apply to the target population so they are reaching the correct young people. So that the organisations in our portfolios are 100% clear about who they are in the best position to help, we ask them to define their target group's risk factors and to consider smart ways of engaging with those young people. There is an art to this; it requires proactivity, because disadvantaged young people are the most difficult to engage.

Apart than the obvious economic inequalities, what other challenges do young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face?

Disadvantaged young people have a higher probability of having additional issues relating to health, mental health, learning disabilities, offending, and more. It's important to understand what these other issues are, to ensure that the programme is best equipped to help improve their educational or employment outcomes.

Why is it in the UK's interest to help and support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds?

At a personal level I think we should help disadvantaged young people improve their life chances as all young people deserve the opportunity to succeed. From a societal perspective it's important to realise that an unequal society has a bearing on the overall wellbeing of a society. Consider the simple separation of the 'haves' and 'have nots'; those that 'have' are affected by those that 'don't have'.

Then there is also the economic argument; the poor life outcomes of those young people end up presenting a huge cost to society. In the context of my work with the Big Lottery Fund, which looks at mental wellbeing in young people aged 10-16, ensuring good mental health at an early age prevents mental ill health at a later age – and the cost of mental ill health to society is enormous.

Over two million young people in the UK are currently economically disadvantaged. How does the UK fare compared to other countries in the EU?

This is quite difficult to measure because it depends on the metric used and, as I said earlier, we consider a number of factors contribute to being considered disadvantaged. According to a 2012 UNICEF report on poverty, the UK comes 18th out of 28, so it isn't the worst. An OECD report that tries to understand general wellbeing (although poverty also has an impact on this) places the UK towards the lower end of the league table. Obviously, our politicians will say that things are getting better for children, that investment is being made to improve the wellbeing and life outcomes of children, but I do think it is generally recognised the UK should and could do better.

It's a difficult choice, but if you had to choose one Impetus-PEF programme or charity partnership that you are most proud of, which would it be?

There is one charity called Street League that stands out. It has been part of the Impetus-PEF portfolio for a number of years now. I no longer manage the relationship but it was one of the first charities I brought into the portfolio when I was relatively new to the job. It's a nice example of what the Impetus-PEF model helps a charity do. Street League's inspiring chief executive really wanted to improve young people's lives through football, by supporting them into employment and giving them structure, building their confidence, creating discipline and forming team players. But, when we first met, the organisation was quite small, and not very focused. In the years we've been working with them, they have grown significantly and their reach has increased considerably.

More importantly, though, they are a lot more focused in terms of the young people they are able to help. Their programmes are much more structured, with more formal support into employment, and they are much clearer about the outcomes they can achieve. By doing that, they have been able to attract funding that otherwise they wouldn't have been able to do, which means they are more sustainable.

This charity is a good example of how an organisation with the passion, drive and commitment can develop into an organisation with impact and a sustainable business



A young person receives additional help with their studies from a coach at one of Impetus-PEF partner charities. Photo courtesy of Impetus-PEF.

model, by applying essential business principles to its management.

How do you go about getting your funding to fund these organisations?

We conduct our own fundraising activities. We were founded by individuals and organisations in the private equity and venture capital sectors and they are continuing to support us. Increasingly, over the years, however, our list of supporters has broadened and we receive funding from trusts and foundations as well as organisations from other sectors.

What’s interesting about our model is that we have also developed a strong network of organisations who offer their service on a pro bono basis to our charity partners. These pro bono professionals help our charity partners by delivering substantial projects in areas including accounting, law, marketing and financial analysis.

Prior to Impetus-PEF, you worked with Save the Children. Could you explain how you contributed to improving the organisation’s overall business model?

Working as a member of Save the Children’s fundraising team, I was given the opportunity to work on a project with the aim of aligning fundraising activities with funding needs. When I joined the organisation, the fundraising team didn’t always have a clear view on what the funding needs were on the front-line. As such, we ended up in situations where fundraising opportunities led to activity, rather than the funding need driving fundraising activities. This struck me as being counter-intuitive. Through the project I got involved in, we tried to switch that around. This led to a different approach to planning and more formal links being created between the operational teams and the fundraising teams. I left Save the Children quite a long time ago now and would be interested to see whether and how the organisation maintained some of the principles we implemented at the time.

In my role at Impetus-PEF, I still have similar conversations with the management teams I support. It is not unusual for funding opportunities to drive activity, rather than strategic priorities driving fundraising. Helping organisations to think more strategically about their priorities and then ensure their fundraising is aligned with that is quite powerful.

You are currently on secondment at the Big Lottery Fund. What is your responsibility there?

I started a one-year secondment with the Big Lottery Fund in May last year. The Big Lottery Fund currently has five big strategic programmes: programmes which seek to invest significant amounts of money (between £75m – over £200m) over long periods of time (from 5 to 10 years) to achieve significant impact for specific groups of people: from young children to people in the older age brackets. The programmes seek to work with local partnerships involving all relevant stakeholders: eg. the voluntary sector, but also statutory agencies, health agencies.

I’m working with the Big Lottery’s HeadStart programme, aiming to improve the mental wellbeing of 10-16 year olds. I was brought in to clarify what the next phase of the programme would look like. We are currently working with 12 local partnerships who have all received an initial tranche of funding. All these partnerships are in the process of developing strategies for further, more substantial funding over the next five years. My role was to clarify Big Lottery’s aim for the next stage of the programme, design the decision-making process and put in place appropriate support for the partnerships to help them with the development of their proposals.

With all this experience what would you say has been the greatest lesson for you?

I would say that it is important for organisations to pause from time to time to reflect on why they are doing what they are doing and question whether they are really achieving what they set out to achieve. Impetus-PEF, as an organisation, also had to go through that process.

Being open to these types of questions requires courage from an organisation’s leadership. And that’s where external partners can be useful: to help challenge the accepted wisdom and the status quo.



www.impetus-pef.org.uk