

SUMMARY

Renfrewshire Council has a long history of supporting Fairtrade and in late 2007 we decided to take our commitment to Fairtrade further and coordinate a county-wide Fairtrade campaign. Our award-winning campaign involved road shows, a colourful 'Fair in the Square' event, producer tours and a Business Brunch all led by the Council. In February 2009, Renfrewshire became Scotland's newest Fairtrade Zone and our campaign continues to grow from strength to strength.

Background

Renfrewshire Council supported local Fairtrade campaigns (Paisley becoming a Fairtrade Town in 2003 and Bishopton becoming a Fairtrade Village in 2007) but we knew there were lots of groups and individuals supporting Fairtrade in the area and that if we all came together we could make a greater impact.

How we did it

We formed a steering group with a variety of local partners - schools, faith groups, local shopping malls and other big employers such as Glasgow Airport, smaller independent retailers, the University and College, established campaigning groups and interested individuals.

The Council was the obvious project coordinator, able to provide resources, administrative support and crucially the political support vital for building a successful campaign.

The first step was to do an audit of current Fairtrade activity, particularly within the Council, liaise with the Fairtrade Foundation about our intention to work towards Fairtrade Zone Status and present this information to Council along with a resolution to support the campaign.

From this point it was then a case of meeting each of the Fairtrade Foundation's five goals with as much imagination and enthusiasm as possible!

Challenges and Learning

We have encountered challenges during our Fairtrade journey. It is always challenging to get people on board with a new project. Volunteers delivered passionate presentations to potential partners on the tangible benefits Fairtrade delivers to over 7.5 million people worldwide. In addition, it was excellent to refer to the increasing market share of Fairtrade products, year on year - that certainly got the retailers interested!

We also, in common with our other local authority neighbours, have experienced problems with supporting Fairtrade within the restrictions of European legislation on public procurement and continue to lobby our MEPs and the relevant Commissioners over this issue.

To coordinate efforts within the Council, our initial approach had been to ask each Council service to put forward a representative to support the campaign. We learnt that this was often the person seen as the most appropriate in terms of job remit. This occasionally resulted in someone with no real interest in Fairtrade being selected. We quickly found out that to campaign on an issue like this you have passion for it. We addressed this by offering *all* our employees the opportunity to be a part of the steering group. This resulted in a really motivated and enthusiastic group of people joining our steering group which has brought a new freshness and focus to the group.

KEY CONTACTS

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www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/fairtrade

Check out Renfrewshire Fairtrade Group on Facebook



Achievements

Through our commitment to Fairtrade the Council's Economic Development team have also been able to support 'Rainbow Turtle', our local Fairtrade shop and charity, from a position where their shop was possibly going to shut down, to expanding their enterprise, becoming the 'West of Scotland Fairtrade Hub' and working in partnership with Imani Enterprises and the Scottish Government to import and distribute products from Malawi.

We were delighted in October 2008 to win the Fairtrade Foundation's 'Outstanding Achievement Award' in recognition of our 'integrated, well-planned and creative campaign'

Looking ahead

Although Renfrewshire is now a Fairtrade Zone we still have much we want to achieve. We held a 'brainstorming break out' session with our steering group to help us evaluate our progress so far, to reaffirm our commitment to Fairtrade, refocus our efforts and create an action plan for the next two years:

- We are now developing a stronger local campaign - encouraging more of Renfrewshire's towns and villages to become Fairtrade supporters
- We are taking our Fairtrade challenge to our Community Planning Partners and offering them our support to become Fairtrade organisations too
- We are focusing on our community groups and faith groups to support them to take their campaigning further
- We will hold another big-scale community event this coming summer.
- We need to renew our Fairtrade Zone Status in February 2010
- We are planning a suitably action-packed Fairtrade Fortnight 2010 - The Big Switch!

