

PRESS RELEASE

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ENTERPRISING CAFÉ IN SHARROW HELPS MAN TURN HIS LIFE AROUND

As Britain lifts out of recession is the launch of Sharrow's SMaRT Venue, a coffee shop with a difference? Is it the taste of a new socially-minded and responsible business?

Mitch had been out of work for nine years before he signed up as one of SMaRT Venue's new barristas. "I lost a lot of time doing drugs and becoming unwell. I closed myself off from the world.

"But working at SMaRT I've realized I actually love talking to the customers, I'm a Yorkshire lad so I have a bit of wit about me and make people smile."

SMaRT Venue is a social enterprise providing an exciting opportunity for local people who have been out of work due to ill health get back into the workplace. It's also delivering the goods to S2's band of coffee lovers. Whether yours is an espresso or a latté, all SMaRT coffee is fair trade, organic and rain forest certificated. The café has already won Sheffield Council's Healthy Choices Award so SMaRT makes it easy for you to indulge AND stay trim. But don't let that put you off! There's a fine selection of cakes and pastries to tempt you.

Karl Newell, SMaRT Venue Manager says "We believe the dynamism and pressure of a commercial enterprise can act as a catalyst to bring out people's potential."

For Mitch signing up as a volunteer workforce member at SMaRT feels like a great stepping stone back into work: "It's given me the opportunity to get a good CV and take it from there. I love working here and I've never said that about any job before. Normally I stick it out for a week and then I'm gone."

SMaRT Venue has been a real community effort – local businesses have pitched in. Project management contractors, Barlows and interior designers, White Design, have transformed, this one time dry cleaners, into a trendy, up market café. Jane Jackson, part of Barlows' Charity Committee explained why they got involved: "Every year Barlows chooses a charity to lend its project management skills to, this year SMaRT stood out to us. It's also a stone's throw from our office so we all get to eat there too!"

Run by national charity, First Step Trust, SMaRT Venue is grateful to NHS Sheffield for their continuing support and to Sheffield City for their contribution to the set up costs. "We know that work can play a vital role in helping people recover from ill health. SMaRT Venue is an innovative approach to rekindling people's belief in themselves and their aspiration to succeed" said Gary McCulloch, NHS Sheffield. A packed coffee shop greeted Sheffield's Lord Mayor, Graham Oxley who cut the ribbon at the official opening on Friday 25th September.

SMaRT Venue can be found at 100 London Road, S2. It is open Tuesday to Friday, 8 am to 5 pm and Saturday, 9 am to 5 pm. Food is available all day. Pre-order to avoid the queues. Call 0114 281 2981, email coffee@smartvenue.org.uk or visit www.smartvenue.org.uk.

More information

SMaRT Venue is a First Step Trust (FST) project. FST is a national charity providing employment and training opportunities for those disadvantaged in the workplace. People sign up as members of a volunteer workforce and participate in the every aspect of running the business – in fact they are critical to its success. Joining FST gives people the chance to become part of a team, build up their work experience, gain qualifications and get help in finding a job. Workforce member, Lizzie said: “Before I started here I’d be awake through the night and sleep during the day. Working here has given me a routine and made me much more organized.” Lizzie takes her job very seriously “If I didn’t come to work I’d be letting people down. Before I started working at the café no one was relying on me – it didn’t really matter what I did. Now I actually feel useful to someone.”

FST has 13 projects around the country with its head office in Woolwich, London.

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For more, go to First Step Trust website <http://www.firststeptrust.org.uk>