

Chickenshed Diversifying Income Case Study



Image courtesy of Chickenshed.

Lily Elizabeth Davies, Executive Director of Marketing, Fundraising and Commerce and William Porter, Corporate Development Manager at Chickenshed spoke to Jacqueline Haxton, AMA Editor

“We recognised that we weren’t leveraging our expertise and assets correctly – not in a way that we could maximise the commercial benefit.”



Published 2018

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Background

Chickenshed – theatre changing lives



Image courtesy of Chickenshed.

Chickenshed was founded over forty years ago in an actual chicken shed. We now have a theatre in Enfield, north London, a branch in Kensington and Chelsea and a network of various 'sheds' across the UK and internationally.

Our programmes are for the benefit of children and young people in the main and we offer inclusive training pathways to the performing arts through a combination of children's and youth theatre workshops, further and higher education courses, vocational training and outreach programmes.

Funding

Chickenshed is incredibly lucky as it has a really broad revenue mix. Half of our income is earned through:

- ticket sales
- membership subscriptions
- education courses
- merchandise sales.

The other half is raised through a diverse spread of sources, including:

- individual giving
- corporate companies
- trusts and foundations
- events
- community.

We had a strategic review in 2015 which looked at where we are now but also where we want to get to in the future.

Following this review Chickenshed recognised that there were further aspirations in terms of our commercial income. In 2016 we had reached the point where we had a plan and list of priorities of how to take that work forward.



Diversifying income streams

— utilising existing assets

Although we had a clear set of aspirations we didn't have a huge amount of investment and resource to put behind it so we needed to think how we could do it smartly in line with our brand and ethos.

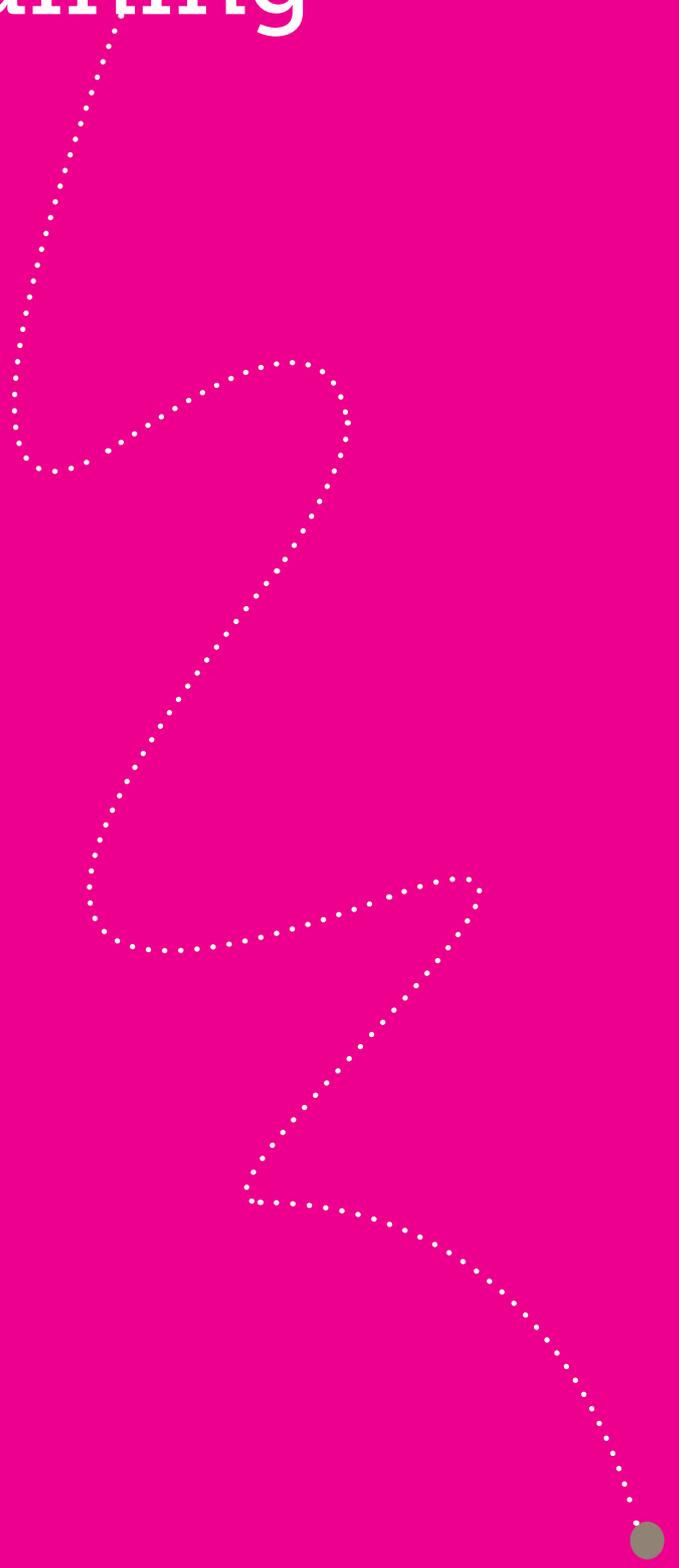
We recognised that we weren't leveraging our expertise and assets correctly — not in a way that we could maximise the commercial benefit.

We identified that our biggest asset was our staff — we have just under 100 permanent members of staff with just under a combined 890 years' experience. We had expertise that we could package in a more commercial way and it wasn't going to cost us anything outside of making sure we plan our work smartly.

At this point we identified the need for scoping — not just looking at other performing arts companies but other organisations who are doing this type of work well such as Stonewall, who generate somewhere in the region of a £1 million a year through their professional training programme.

Given education is a core strength of Chickenshed we recognised that we could deliver training in a different way. We decided to package what people said they were looking for in terms of training modules with our expertise in inclusive practice. The market opportunity we identified was potentially enormous.

Chickenshed's Corporate Training Programme



Building on success

developing a new training programme

Chickenshed already had experience of one-day corporate training in partnership with the London Business School. Aimed at different companies on a variety of topics, this training had been led by Paul Morrall, Chickenshed's Director of Education & Training.

We had received very positive feedback from those training days but we hadn't built on the successes. So we decided why not have a formal structure to the training and look at how we can market it.

We now have three main courses that we deliver as part of our corporate training:

- diversity and inclusivity
- unconscious bias
- team work and communication.

These topics were the ones that we thought best suited the skills that we had in-house and fit in with the structure that we had for the training days.

Our corporate training can take place either at Chickenshed's venue or at a place most convenient to the company. Some companies prefer training at their premises so that there's less time out of the office.

We're very flexible — all we need to deliver the day is a big enough room, some chairs and a PowerPoint. There's not much to set up so it's very easy for us to take what we do to any venue.

The programme in its official state has been in place for just under a year. We're still testing and learning but the product we're developing is very much based on what our customers are telling us what they need.

Chickenshed either approaches a company or a company approaches us about the type of corporate training they're looking for.

We have standard templates for how a day or a half-day's training could be structured. We discuss this, along with the topic, with the client and find out what else over and above our standard template the company would like to get out of the day. We identify what particular outcomes the company wants, to make the training more bespoke.

For example, we did some training for Knight Frank and Savills recently and they wanted us to add some more real estate industry information to the day so that their colleagues could relate more to the content. We were able to mould the course to what they wanted.

The Corporate Training is led either by Dave Carey, Senior Creative Producer, Music or Paul Morrall, Director of Education & Training. We also include Chickenshed staff practitioners and students within the training day.



Built-in not bolted on building a new income stream

If you visited Chickenshed's website about 18 months ago it was obvious that we were selling tickets for shows but it wasn't obvious what we did outside of that. We're now developing our website as a platform that shows all the work that Chickenshed does and how it's intrinsically linked.

Our Corporate Training programme relates back to why we exist as an organisation and the difference we're trying to make to this world and what makes us different to other organisations.

As we develop our Corporate Training programme the more we're linking it across our main brand channels — our website and social media.

In terms of marketing we haven't had a huge amount of investment — we've spent in the region of £100 since the programme was launched. We have a fantastic resource in William Porter, our Corporate Development Manager. He's developed the entire programme, the course materials and products that we sell, as well as selling the programme and building and managing client relationships.

We're making our networks work for us, which is really paying off. Our Development Board have been hugely supportive of this programme as an initiative. We've also got our Board of Trustees who are kept very well informed and up to date on the successes and new clients, which is helping build their confidence in the programme. This has leveraged their engagement and involvement as well.

We also have 'open taster-days' — half-day sessions where one or two people from companies can come along to Chickenshed and experience a taster of our Corporate Training programme. These half-days have been a great way of getting companies to see our work first-hand and from that we have built up a lot of contacts who have gone on to book Chickenshed's corporate training for their companies.

Impact

benefits of diversifying income

Partnerships

The Corporate Training programme has had many benefits notably it's been a great way of introducing companies to Chickenshed; to experience the work we do and see the value of what we're doing. From that we can build new relationships and potentially develop new fundraising partnerships.

We'd like to use the one-off training days to develop a long-lasting partnership with these companies so that we can offer a range of courses for their staff over a number of different days. It's a great way of them learning about Chickenshed and experiencing our work first-hand while training their staff.

Insight

We involve our students and alumni within the Corporate Training days. These are students from our BA, BTEC or Foundation Degree courses. The programme provides those students with training opportunities so that they can get more hands-on experience working as practitioners

One of the things the delegates enjoy most about our Corporate Training programme is working alongside our students and getting an insight into the students' lives and working with people from different backgrounds and abilities. It's an impactful way of learning and a great way to understand the issues that we're covering, such as diversity and inclusivity.

Financial

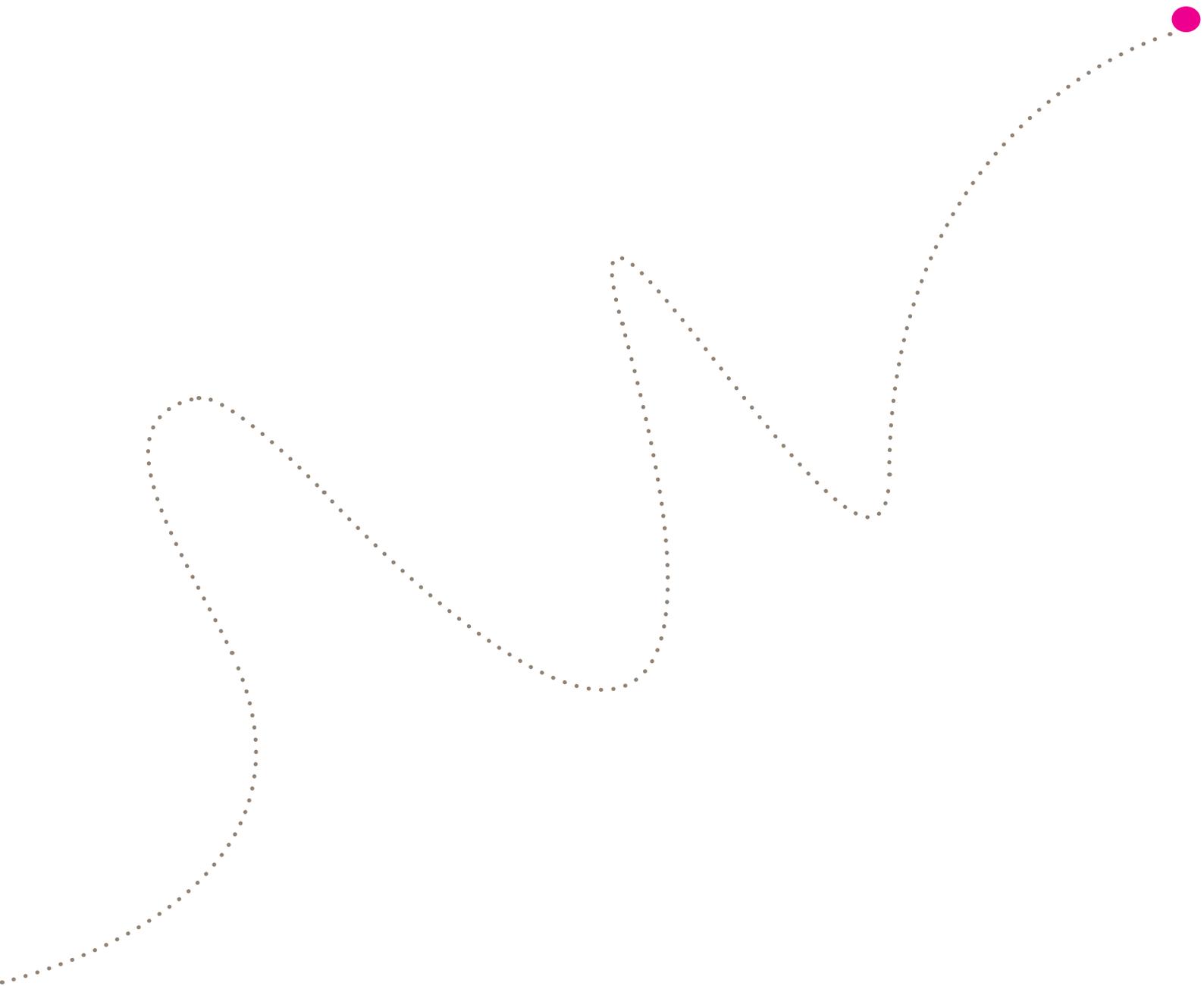
We're already seeing an income stream coming from the Corporate Training programme. Over the past three months we've had about £30,000 worth of business from Corporate Training. We have a whole range of courses lined up in 2018 and a few pilots with different companies in the offing, which will hopefully lead into repeat business.

Social experience

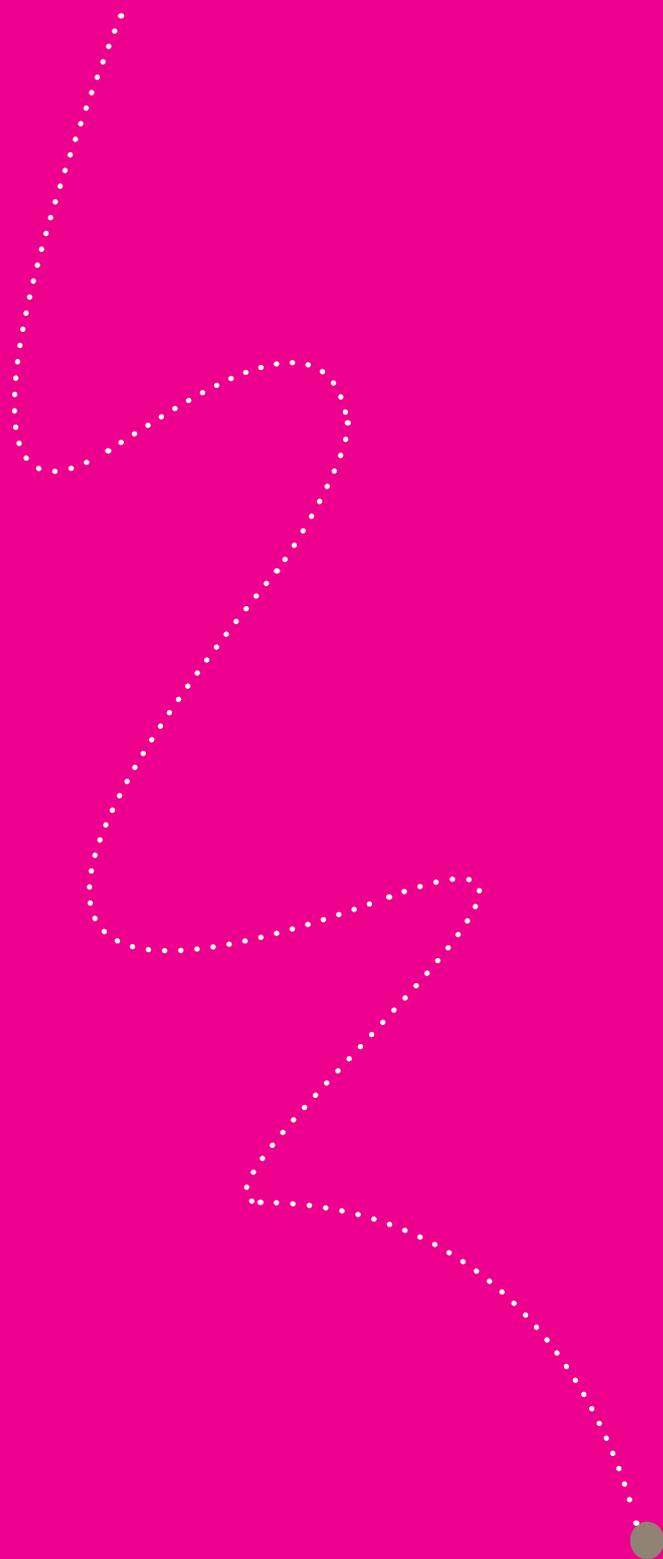
We offer a hands-on training experience that gives those people who go through our programme the experience of what life is like working with a truly diverse group of people and the value that inclusion brings to a working environment, which is then also serving our greater impact as an organisation.

Working together

The development of the new Corporate Training programme has brought our organisation closer together. Decisions have been made across the organisation with the commercial side of the organisation working closely with the artistic side. There's a better understanding of what each team does — whether that's the education, fundraising or commercial team.



Recommendations



Diversifying income streams

key recommendations

- **Strengths and successes**

Why are you the best in the world at what you do? Start the process by looking at who you are; what you do really well, and honing in on your organisation's track-record.

- **Utilise your assets**

What skills, experience and resources do you have that you can leverage? What can be repurposed to make a new product aimed at other sectors?

- **Built-in not bolted on**

Revenue diversification in any sector is often seen as something added on and managed in isolation to other parts of the organisation. If you can build the new income stream into the infrastructure of your organisation it's a lot easier for it to live and breathe what you do.

- **Leverage your existing networks**

Your trustees, development board, supporter base and corporate partners are your biggest fans and advocates. Take the time to educate them about what you're doing and why you're doing it — they will happily open their contact books if they have confidence in what you're doing.

- **Looking backwards to move forwards**

Talk to colleagues at your organisation and within the sector and identify what you've done in the past — what has worked well and what can you do better?



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