**Case Study**

**'Community Challenges are set up to help communities understand how to make their tourism offering better. They will pay back time, money & effort invested and will be a hugely beneficial experience.'**

# Keith reaches out for success

*'Over the last few years there'd been a lot of talk about regeneration and how to get things moving in Keith but not a lot had happened. Now, by focusing on what we CAN do rather than what we can't, what unites rather than divides us, and by getting all the various groups in the town working together, we've managed to really get things moving on a number of fronts.'* **Jane MacPherson, Boogie Woogie Café, Keith**

**Can we fix it? Yes we can!**
Negativity and territorialism are the enemies of progress: the first because it kills motivation and the second because it denies the existence of common interests. Keith had been experiencing a bit of both, compounded by change in nature from a commercial centre to a dormitory town. It took a couple of businesses who were new to the town to challenge both mindsets – they saw the potential that others had stopped noticing. Pride & Passion was able to stir things up, too, by asking some 'what if' questions and by playing devil's advocate in a couple of meetings. Examples of other towns who'd successfully focused on small steps and getting stuff done persuaded representatives from a range of interest groups in Keith to try something similar. *'It seems like everyone is pleased to be able to make a fresh start and try the whole 'accentuate the positive' way of doing things. Everyone is actively involved, has their little piece of the jigsaw to contribute and can see the bigger ambition that will be good for the town in lots of ways. It's not always easy but nobody wants to lose momentum now.'* **Gwenda Michielsen, Craighurst Guesthouse**

The group made a start on some small practical actions like

- a leaflet swap evening accompanied by a glass of wine
- creating a database of all tourism-related businesses in town so that referrals were easy
- trying out a rota system for cafes to open for evening meals
- kilt-making demos and heritage displays in the station building of the historic railway
- asking tourism and marketing experts in the local area if they'd give a bit of (free) advice.

The whole point was to try to ensure that, for people already coming to Keith, and for Keithonians themselves, what they found there was good quality, enjoyable and multi-faceted, meaning that they'd want to come back, spend longer or talk it up to other people.

**We are not alone**
Whilst getting stuck into doing things, the group realized that Keith also needed a better idea of what it had to offer for visitors and locals alike. It would then need a plan for how to give people what they wanted and how to attract new visitors to the town as well. Now, that could have been the start of a navel-gazing exercise but luckily Pride & Passion knew that the two neighbouring towns were doing their own versions of the same exercise so we suggested they get together to compare notes.

And lo! One workshop later they discovered they had lots in common but a fair amount that was unique or complementary to what the other towns had. Walking trails and rail links between Keith, Dufftown and Huntly meant that the classic icons of whisky, castles, natural heritage, shortbread, tartan and kilts were all present in abundance in a 'golden triangle' bounded by the three towns. The towns realized that by joining forces they'd have a local offering that could more easily tempt visitors on day, short break or 7-day trips.

They now invite reps from the other towns to meetings in each of the three places, and the minutes of each group are sent to the chairmen in the other towns so everyone knows what's going on up the road.

Another up-side to having a time-defined plan is that bodies such as the Enterprise agencies, the Council and commercial sponsors see the organization and ambition in the plan as a sign of credibility and are more willing to provide various types of assistance to the group as a result.

## Keith – now visible from cyberspace

Without a town or visitors' website Keith had no real on-line focus for events and services other than individual businesses' or events' websites: no overview of what the town had to offer or what was going on there that people might be interested in. They needed a decent web presence. Pride & Passion was able to link them up with the team at GreaterSpeyside.com. Now, as soon as information was available it could be fed into the greaterspeyside.com site – the highest profile site for the Moray area – alongside that for the whole area. It meant Keith didn't have to wait to develop its own site to fill the information void. It's been able to use best practice from other town sites via GreaterSpeyside.com in creating a new site for Keith.

## What the 'Community Challenge' provided

*'The Challenge has bolstered enthusiasm, increased confidence, helped us focus, provided opportunities to develop relationships and access to professional advice.'* **Maggie Cruickshank, Mither Tongue.**

Pride & Passion's presence in an area, through Community Challenge projects, seems to help local businesses and others focus on how they do what they do, how it comes across to customers or visitors and also how they feel about the place themselves. The big win in Keith was getting people back into a positive frame of mind and getting their collective light out from under the bushel. Groups learned about what other groups were up to, and what they had in common. Workshops, events and getting Keith, Dufftown and Huntly together has helped create a new perspective on the town and area which has helped businesses there identify how best to capitalise on the assets around them.

## What did we all learn?

What does Keith's experience tell us:

1. A fresh perspective on a place can help remind locals of what their place has to offer.
2. Just because some things that were tried before didn't work, doesn't mean you should stop trying. They might work now; or something slightly different may work instead.
3. It's motivating to be able to achieve small successes, step by step, rather than being daunted by an enormous goal like 'regeneration' or 'collaboration'. Thinking of small things that would advance the general cause and working on them is much easier.
4. Having an overall goal and a plan for how to reach it does help. You can identify what needs to be done, by whom and by when, as well as where the gaps in your knowledge or resources may be.
5. Some folk may not get involved of their own accord. They may be shy. They may think they're not invited. They may not know about what you're doing. Most people will at least appreciate being asked to join in, even if they may not be able to accept. They may be able to offer help in different way. "Shy bairns get nowt", so if you want something, ask away. If there's a consultant or marketing guru in your midst, ask them for a bit of a steer, for the good of their local area!

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