

Here to Help But  
Not to Judge



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Lofty Heights has two clear aims; to improve people's quality of life in their own homes whilst providing jobs and training for local young people

## The Magnificent Seventh

We are really excited be celebrating the seventh anniversary of Lofty Heights CIC this month. Where has the time gone? Take a look at where we started, how far we've come, and our grand plans for the future.

Below we have two pictures. The first is one of our very first publicity pictures showing our very first team of trainees with a hired van, all ready for our first day's work, emptying a loft. Next to that is our most recent one that shows our newest recruits, along with our very experienced team. They are standing beside Percy, our second newest recruit, the van that you helped to purchase. I'm not sure if it's best to play spot the difference or spot the similarities. Two of the team from the first picture are still with us – Dave and Shab. I will take the opportunity to dig out lots of very old photos of the two them so we can admire how they have grown. More seriously let's take the time to say thank you to their hard work that got Lofty Heights to where it is now – a Loftier Height!



## Once Upon a Time



In a galaxy far, far away... Well Grundisburgh 2012 anyway. A very clever lady, we shall call her Olive, noticed that a number of older people were unable to claim their free loft and wall insulation because they could not make clear access to the walls or to empty their loft themselves. At the same time, she was working with young people at risk of homelessness who told her about the 'impossibility' of having a job and the difference that would make to their lives.

So, there we go – seven years later we are an overnight success!

Ours is a story of niches. Olive's talent for finding the things that need to get done, that are 'no-one's' job, is what has made Lofty Heights CIC. Things like: moving and re-siting furniture to enable carpet fitting, carrying broken washing machines outside so that they can be collected by the council so a replacement can be installed, the cutting down of an overgrown garden before regular gardeners can be hired. And the inspiration of people to do better and think beyond the 'not my job' mentality.

But this is not just the story of a woman who had mystical powers – this is actually a story of what happens when you give young people an opportunity, when you believe that they can achieve great things.



Two of our first team are still with us. Dave and Shab were collected from laybys around Suffolk by Olive in her camper van. They then sat at her kitchen table and were instrumental in the early days of brainstorming and plotting, of dropping leaflets through doors and attending functions to promote a tiny little not-for-profit company with very grand ideas. Chances are that if you have worked with us then you have met Shab or Dave. They are now training the new team and leading the teams on site. They joined for a chance and have stayed because they believe in Lofty Heights.

We cannot complete a review without saying thank you Tony Quinton. He has been our secret weapon. He is our greatest cheerleader, our bookkeeper, handyman, chauffeur, cloth washer and Hoover de-pooper! As you can see in the photo Tony truly is the King of Can-Do! This has been a light-hearted history of Lofty Heights but the work we do is a very serious business. We are achieving great things and we have plans for more.



## What a Team!

Partnership working is a bit of a buzzword at the moment but it's at the core of what we do. To be a good 'partner' you need to have an understanding of exactly what part everyone plays in achieving outcomes for individuals.

This week we were called in to a home by the **fire service** to see what help we could provide for a lady in a cluttered home who could no longer use the stairs to get to her bed. The fire service knows all about our **Homeward Bound** Hospital Discharge service and called us in. We visited on the same day and made a report to **REACT**, Reactive Emergency Assessment Community Team, regarding the lady's needs. This actually sounds like a wand-waving, straight to the happy ending story - but it isn't.

The fire service had received a call from an adult daughter driven to despair over her elderly mother's pride at refusing all offers of help to adapt her home to her increasingly frail capabilities. It took several goes for Mick, the fire service volunteer, to gain enough trust to be allowed into the property. The scene he found was not unusual in the homes of elderly people – there was a lot of treasured furniture from a lifetime of creating a home, a room full of broken things that are too difficult for someone with mobility issues to dispose of, and a family room with seating to sit a large family, and piles of paper, a potential fire risk. Also, gathered around the central seat was all of the things that a person might need throughout the day to reduce the need to retrieve things from other places.

We attended the very same day that we received the call from the **fire service** and had a long chat with our lady and her daughter about what was needed and what could be achieved. A further consult with **REACT** let us know that if we made suitable space, they would ensure that the much-needed hospital bed would be delivered on the same or next day by **Medequip**.

And that is what happened.

Our team worked in the house for a whole day, clearing space and hefting large items out of the house for collection by the **council waste team** as part of their bulky waste service.

*"I cannot praise your team highly enough, they were just lovely, lovely, lovely people and I cannot believe the difference that you made"* Said the customer's daughter the day after this happened.

This was resolved with apparent ease because the fire service knew to call us and we knew who to contact in REACT, and REACT do this stuff really well.

Between us all, we have greatly reduced the risk of fire in the home of person who would be unable to exit safely if a fire occurred. Reduced the further risk of fire spreading to neighbouring properties. Prevented the inevitable hospital admission of a person unable to live safely in her home simply because she did not have room for the equipment needed to help her. Enable care to be provided in the home when needed. Reduced the stress of the family who were concerned for the quality of life of an amazing lady too proud to admit she was struggling to cope.

Although this is a great example of partnership working for the most part, we simply call this working!



## Homeward Bound

We are making a difference in the Ipswich and East Suffolk CCG area. Our pilot project has been so successful that it has been extended by another year with a review pending to become a mainstream service.

From the outstanding feedback we've received we know that it's not just about getting a tricky job done but how it gets done and being flexible in arranging of the work. One thing most regularly commented on is that the team sound like they are enjoying their work and that they are a pleasure to have in the home. How often do you think that about workers that come to your house? It's also the time taken with an assessment, the conversation that can encourage someone to accept a little extra help to enable a much better outcome.

It's not just moving a bed or cleaning a kitchen that improves lives, it's seeing the person as a whole and not just a logistical problem.

As the previous case study shows the difference we are making is not just about reducing bed blocking and speeding up discharges from hospital but about preventing those admissions and creating better quality of life for those people staying in their own homes.



## The Shape of Success

We talk a lot about outcomes in our work but what exactly are they? Actually, the best outcome is rarely modern minimalist living set in a sterile environment. Sometimes, the best outcome is reducing the level of clutter from an 8 or 9 on the clutter scale, used in the SCC Self Neglect and Hoarding Policy, to 4-5 on the scale with a person happy with their environment and open to talking to other professionals about the ongoing help they need. It's someone living in their home with their elderly pets because it is those pets that make their life worth living.

We talk about how hard it is to get engagement from people and the often tortuous route to reaching a balance between hoarding and safety, but that isn't all that we do. This week we worked with a lady so crippled by anxiety that she hadn't let anyone in her house for seven years, her home was so cluttered that she had been unable to use her kitchen or bathroom for nearly as long. When we met her, we planned work that looked to be painstakingly slow but achievable to enable essential adaptations to commence, yet when the team arrived they managed to achieve the two-day goal by midday. Admittedly, the goal was a small one but time is the part that is needed to support someone with severe anxiety.

With the 'hard' part done, our customer was then looking at an additional day and a half with our team and a blank sheet of objectives.

So, with a goal to clear space in the garage we ended up with a clear garage, small bedroom, hallway, half a loft and half a lounge, and most importantly a customer wanting to know if we can come back! When the customer wants us to come back, they engage more fully with their social worker and other agencies involved in their welfare. That is what success looks like to us

**Now we are 7,  
Some words from Stephen Taylor– Lofty Heights CIC Director**



It was such a brilliantly simple idea when I heard it, I couldn't believe nobody else had thought of it. Set up a company to employ young people not in education, employment or training, investing time and support to turn them into a crew that could empty the lofts of people too frail to do it themselves, and so allow them to get their lofts insulated (for free, at that time), keep their houses warmer and keep them healthier. At the same time the young men would be trained for the job, given purpose, and earn a wage, maybe for the first time ever and this was not a charity. It was to be

a company that reinvested its income back into more NEETs, reaching more people in need.

I was in full time work, but I happily agreed to be a critical friend, to become a founding board member, and to bring whatever skills and knowledge I could to supporting Olive make Lofty Heights a reality. I felt honoured to be involved.

Suddenly, it was a year later. The original young men had been trained in partnership with Otley College. We had a work crew; we had some funding. We had jobs coming our way. We had a growing reputation for being ethical, trustworthy and reliable.

We started to support people who did not have a loft to clear for insulation. These were people who needed not their loft, but whole rooms, the whole house, decluttered. But not like on the increasing number of freak show TV programmes that filmed distressed people being treated like naughty children, being rigorously "spring cleaned" by stern "lifestyle specialists". We worked *with* people, talked *with* them, agreed *with* them what would be taken away. No quick fixes.

We directors interviewed for a person with the right set of skills and knowledge to be able to gently help people come to terms with their hoarding, and perhaps begin to address the underlying causes: fear of change, loss and grief, perhaps a desperate wish to control their environment, to feel safe.

The years have passed and suddenly, here we are. Business plans have been made, adapted, presented to funders, adapted again, re-presented. We've expanded our services, and we've taken on some work from the able-to-pay market. Often this is house clearance after a death, acting responsibly and ethically, finding and collating paperwork as we go.

Crew members have left, others have joined. We've recruited specialists, we've grown a network of contacts; people and organisations we trust and exchange help with.

And still I feel proud when I tell people about Lofty Heights. There's a thread that runs through everyone connected with the company; a sense of the responsibility and trust that people place in our company.

Happy 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, Lofty Heights.

## A Final Word From Olive

Who could have foreseen that the lofty emptying service originally established in 2012 would have turned into what it is today and is still growing?

### Impact

It's been an amazing seven years and our impact has been huge. Over time we have engaged 28 young adults in pre employment training and 9 in a special programme focusing on 'improving the future life chances of young adults' who were not yet ready for employment.

We have seen how individual's confidence, self-esteem and belief in themselves has grown as a result, enabling many to go on to do further training or get jobs with local employers.

We have provided 16 young adults with work experience with Lofty Heights and it has proved to be a great way for them to 'test the water' with us and see if the often, difficult, dirty and challenging work we do in the community with vulnerable people is for them. As a result, 11 young adults have had the opportunity of real paid employment with us and today we have 5 experienced operatives who make up our core team. Others have moved onto jobs with local employers.

However, our impact doesn't end there. As across our range of services we have helped over 1000 people in one way or another. Providing information, signposting or practical help within the home or garden, enabling hospital discharges or supporting family carers. Who could have foreseen all this in 2012?



### Team Work

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Dave and Shab who were amongst our first team for their hard work and commitment during the highs and lows over the years. They helped me to grow and develop Lofty Heights. Jaki and Georgina joined us later and they too have played a significant role in growing, developing and sustaining Lofty Heights. Thanks also to Curtis, Alex, Dan and Becky who have joined us along the way and make up the team.



A special mention to Tony, my long-suffering husband as without his support from the first rumblings of my 'crazy idea' to today. Lofty Heights would not have been possible. He is probably the hardest worked volunteer in Suffolk.

Behind the scene's keeping me on the straight and narrow are our unpaid directors Stephen, Keith and Rob.

So, thank you one and all for firstly believing in me, 'getting me' and supporting Lofty Heights to help achieve this significant milestone and helping to make a huge difference to the lives of vulnerable people in

Suffolk.

**Here's to the next 7 years**

Olive