

Clarity brings purpose

BY NABELAH FREDERICKS

HAVING a clearly defined purpose, is the difference between success and giving up, for social entrepreneur Karen Moss.

Moss is the founder and owner of Steps Charity, a non-profit business that provides training and creates awareness around clubfoot, while distributing equipment used to treat the condition.

Clubfoot is a musculoskeletal birth deformity which affects about 200 000 babies worldwide.

"About one in 500 babies are affected in South Africa, compared to the average of one in 750 for the rest of the world," points out Moss.

South Africa and the surrounding region therefore has one of the highest instances of clubfoot in the world, with about 11 000 babies affected in southern Africa annually.

Back in 2003 when Moss's son was born with the deformity there was very little known about clubfoot.

The condition was being treated by means of surgery, but Moss and her husband soon discovered that an alternative treatment was being used in the US.

After some research she came across the Ponseti Method. The method was devised more than 60 years ago by Dr Ingacio Ponseti. Instead of cutting the ligaments and tendons to treat the condition, plaster casts and braces are used over an average of three months to correct the deformity.

Moss opted to use this method of treatment for her son and when she came back to South Africa in mid-2003, she started creating awareness among parents of children born with clubfoot.

As a result of Moss's awareness drive, a Johannesburg doctor came to attend a workshop on the Ponseti method in the US that same year.

Once back in South Africa, the pair joined up to provide training to other doctors across the country.

"I realised that I could not do the training as an individual and would need to register as a business. There was so much paperwork, but the business was finally registered in 2005," explains Moss.

A year later, in 2006 the first training workshop kicked off with about 60 doctors in attendance from all over the country.

"I brought in Brazilian, UK and Canadian doctors to assist with the training. Their tickets were sponsored by South African Airways and we were able to secure funding from Southern African Vehicle Renting and Leasing Association (Savralla)," says Moss.

Steps Charity was largely



Karen Moss, the founder of Steps Charity helping to fit a cast on a baby with clubfoot.

funded by Savralla, until Moss realised two years ago that she could generate income through distributing overseas clubfoot-related equipment locally. This is how the social enterprise, Steps Charity, came to be born.

"A non-profit can't just rely on funders. It needs to find its own revenue stream. The paperwork to register as a distributor was the biggest drain. There was so much red tape and that's why lots of people give up. If I was not so sure about my purpose, I would have given up" says Moss.

But, she persevered and today Steps Charity is an international organisation having opened a branch in Botswana in July last year, followed by one in Namibia a few months later in November.

Her hard work and dedication has also led to more clinics across the country adopting the Ponseti method.

Another of her successes is her self-published children's storybook, "My clever night-night shoes", which sells at R125 and has already sold 2 500 copies since its launch in June.

She says she wrote the book to help children understand the treatment of clubfoot, but it is also serves as another revenue stream for her business.

"Everything we do as social entrepreneurs is to the benefit of our purpose and to help us fund that purpose," adds Moss.

Her future plans include accessing funding to employ more staff at Johannesburg clinics and implementing an SMS messaging system to communicate with parents.

Moss also runs a programme at



Join the online discussion

SINCE last month social entrepreneurs have a new platform to learn about what works well in creating success in the social enterprise sector.

This follows the launch of Talking Social Enterprise, an online "talk network", hosted on the second or third Tuesday evening of each month at 7.30 pm.

"The show aims to stimulate debate amongst entrepreneurs and others involved in social enterprises.

We are creating a space to share experiences and ideas so that the increased interest we experience currently in social entrepreneurship is turned into good impact," says Jaco Slabbert, one of the Talking Social Enterprise curators.

The event is hosted on the Google Hangouts platform, and accessible from either a computer or a mobile device.

• Sign up via www.TalkingSocialEnterprise.net.

Tygerburg Hospital in Cape Town where she trains unemployed mothers to talk and support parents of patients with clubfoot, while receiving a small stipend.

Her advice to other social entrepreneurs? Start with a clear strategy and be certain about what you want to achieve.

• Visit www.steps.org.za and www.clubfoot.co.za for more information.

Use bigger goals to direct your biz

BY MARCUS COETZEE

THE second principle in our "think like a social enterprise" series is to be able to clearly define the purpose of your enterprise in a single sentence without using jargon.

Too many businesses wander around the world without a clear purpose.

These enterprises are like ships without a destination and a lighthouse to guide them.

A van recently drove past me with the phrase "innovative sustainable solutions" painted on the side. This got me thinking about how its management team was able to make strategic decisions. I also wondered what its customers thought and how engaged its staff were.

Look around and you'll notice that successful enterprises have clearly defined their purpose



Marcus Coetsee

using simple language. They know what they do and why they do it. For example, the purpose of Steps Charity (a non-profit) is to "eliminate clubfoot in Africa".

The business has a clear sense about what it should focus on in order to be successful.

There is also evidence that clarity of purpose helps bring staff, customers and strategic partners closer to an enterprise. It helps instil a sense of ownership. Leaders should therefore consider making purpose a central focus of their enterprises. They should help staff realise how they are contributing to this purpose. This will increase levels of engagement, creativity and productivity. After all, a business is a community.

The purpose of a business is never to just capture market share and make money. This is like saying your purpose on earth is to eat food and breathe air.

Charles Handy recommends that all enterprises realise that they play an important role in society. He suggests that they define their purpose in social terms, and clearly explain why they exist and how they

contribute to society.

Once upon a time, vision and mission statements were used to convey the purpose of an enterprise. Unfortunately, these have tended to become so abstract and full of jargon that they're almost useless now. Hence, my advice to focus on purpose instead.

Entrepreneurs should first try to understand their own purpose in life. Start off by knowing yourself, and remember that the purpose of your enterprise should ideally serve your own personal purpose.

Once you've learnt this principle, you should be able to say "the purpose of (insert your enterprises name) is to, and we do this by...".

• Marcus Coetsee is a strategist at the African Social Entrepreneurs Network. Visit www.marcuscoetsee.co.za.