

Track your achievement

BY NABELAH FREDERICKS

BE brutally honest with yourself when gathering evidence to check whether your social enterprise is making an impact and adjust your programmes if need be.

This is the advice from Edwin Corbett, managing director at child and youthcare centre James House. With 15 years of experience in this sector, Corbett's advice is not to be taken lightly.

James House was founded in 1996 by a group of church women who ran a soup kitchen and named the organisation after a street child who was successfully assisted by these women. In 2000, it was registered as an independent non-profit organisation.

"The focus on dealing with orphans left in toilets, for example, at the height of the Aids pandemic in the 1980s through to early 2000 was reactionary, but it soon became clear that early intervention and prevention was needed," says Corbett.

This is what the members of James House set out to do. The organisation's programmes were adjusted by implementing child-care forums using 10 community volunteers to help identify children from the same area who were at risk. Once these children were identified, usually those from child-headed homes, help was dispensed to families in the way of assisting with child-



Pictured here are children being assisted by the child and youthcare centre, James House.

care grants and helping them gain access to drop-in centres. Drop-in centres are container-like offices which operate as a communal facilities where children at risk of being placed in an institution such as a home or juvenile facility can take a shower, receive assistance with their homework, enjoy a meal and do their laundry. With clearly defined outcomes such as these James House has been able to

measure whether or not it has had an impact on the communities it serves. Corbett points out that proof of this is that the organisation received a recent request from the Department of Social Development to carry out a presentation on its strategies.

"Thanks to the success of our programmes, James House has also rolled out two more sites where assistance is provided. Each site has 25 child-care workers working

in their respective communities," says Corbett. One programme that the organisation has had to make adjustments to in order to make a bigger impact is its Boys Best Adolescent Programme – a six-month therapeutic programme.

The programme has clearly defined outcomes and measures its success using school absenteeism, by way of observations by trained psychologists and official psychometric testing. Further



Join the online discussion

SOCIAL entrepreneurs have a new platform to learn about successful social enterprises.

This follows the launch of Talking Social Enterprise, an online "talk network", hosted on the third Wednesday evening of each month at 7.30 pm. It aims to stimulate debate amongst social enterprise entrepreneurs and is hosted on the Google Hangouts platform.

• Sign up via www.TalkingSocialEnterprise.net.

proof of the organisation's success is the role that it has been able to play in the development of child-care workers as a profession.

"The South African Council of Social Service Professions has drafted regulations for the Social Service Professions Act and has called for comment on formalising the child-care workers profession," says Corbett. Previously child-care workers were simply volunteers, without training.

Gather evidence to prove your good social impact

THE fourth principle in our Think like a Social Enterprise series is to gather evidence of having achieved your promised social impact.

This builds upon the lessons contained in principle two (clearly define your purpose) and principle three (determine your social outcomes).

Social enterprises exist to make a difference in the world by using business thinking to help fix a social or environmental problem. Social enterprises are becoming increasingly popular as businesses become interested in social issues, and as non-profit organizations apply business principles.

These enterprises need to know if it is being effective at creating change in the world. There are many different views on how to decide this.

Some people believe that it is near to impossible to accurately measure the effectiveness of a social enterprise.

Instead, they suggest

that we just ask the opinions of stakeholders such as staff, investors, donors and beneficiaries.

Alternately, they suggest that we inspect an enterprise's internal systems and judge its effectiveness based upon this.

While the above ingredients are important, I believe that an effective social enterprise is able to achieve the social and environmental change that it sets out to achieve.

So how would you measure this? The first step is to clearly identify the social or environmental outcomes you want to achieve. This could include things such as the successful rehabilitation of prisoners or increased functioning of a clinic.

Second step is to identify indicators that represent this outcome. These indicators must be measurable. For example, good indicators for the successful rehabilitation of prisoners could include whether they have found employment and stayed

crime free.

Likewise, indicators for the increased functioning of a clinic could include patient satisfaction levels or whether the clinic is clean and has all the equipment it needs. Third step is to determine how to measure these indicators, and gather the information that is needed.

It may be necessary to collect statistics, interview people or run focus groups. Tools such as questionnaires, checklists, discussion guides and spreadsheets may be need to be developed.

You will need to document your approach and consult with some experts to make sure you are doing things correctly.

These three steps will lay the foundation for measuring your effectiveness at creating positive changes in the world.

I suggest you just jump in and start measuring these changes.

Don't wait for the perfect method. Just start and do it the best you can.



Marcus Coetzee is the author of Think like a Social Enterprise.

It's important to get in the habit of measuring.

Then each time you decide to measure you impact, you will improve on the previous time.

There is a lot you can do to improve your research approach.

You could consult with experts, set up a research committee to advise you, speak to some more experienced organizations, search the internet or attend a short course. Overtime your results will become more convincing and scientific.

These results will enable you to improve the effectiveness of

your enterprise.

You will also be surprised at how your investors, staff and partners become very excited about the difference your enterprise is making in the world.

Even if you only run a small business, you will definitely be having some positive impact.

Start by measuring this, and over time you may even become a social enterprise.

• Marcus Coetzee is a strategist specialising in social enterprises. He also heads the African Social Entrepreneurs Network.