

# Care for children and community

A Rivett child-care centre is the first business to operate under a new Social Enterprise logo, given to organisations that provide employment for people from marginalised backgrounds, **ANDREE STEPHENS** writes

**A** NEW child-care centre has quietly taken up residence in Rivett, not only marking a fresh beginning for the small community which lost its primary school, but representing a new era in the way Canberra enterprises do business.

The Noah's Ark child-care centre is already operating at almost-full capacity after opening only four weeks ago, and according to Noah's Ark executive officer Wendy Addison, it is proving a viable, successful addition to the Noah's Ark services.

And viability is what counts. The child-care centre is designed to make money; a clear departure for the not-for-profit organisation. But that money profits will be channelled into the services Noah's Ark has provided to the community over the past 30 years – services such as its toy library, the early childhood support program, or its special needs support programs.

In particular, the profits will help support its after-school care program for teenagers with a disability – a program which had its funding cut by Government last year.

“We wanted to move away from that reliance on government money,” Addison said. “And this is one way of making us more self sufficient.”

The child-care centre is also the first business of its kind under a new Social Enterprise logo, a branding not unlike the “Made in Australia” symbol or the Heart Foundation’s tick for healthy foods.

The logo indicates when a business or enterprise provides employment opportunities to those who may be struggling to get mainstream work.

They are staffed or managed by people from marginalised backgrounds, for example, at-risk youth, migrants and refugees, those living with mental illness or a physical/intellectual disability, indigenous Australians and those returning to work after a prolonged absence.

In the case of the Noah's Ark child-care centre, Addison said staff included trained teachers and qualified child-care workers, including a psychologist for special needs support, and “69 per cent mums”.

“They’re the stay-at home mums who have no formal qualifications but have a wealth of knowledge in child-care,” Addison said.

Many take on training to get more marketable skills in child-care; some have children with



**A revolutionary concept: staff join the children as Julie Mitchell reads from a book at the Noah's Ark centre in Rivett.**

Photos: RICHARD BRIGGS

special needs and have been unable to work in a “sympathetic environment” in terms of life, family and work commitments, and others may have been dealing with a mental health issue which had made it difficult to get steady employment.

Social enterprise means the centre helps them, they help the centre, and the community in general benefits.

So how, then, does one get involved?

Go back to June of last year, when a new virtual business network was launched in Canberra, the ACT Social Enterprise Hub. It links non-profit and charity organisations with pro-bono partners and business mentors to create feasible and profitable businesses that also have a social purpose.

The hub operates on three levels: non-profit and community organisations develop social enterprises from concept through to implementation; pro-bono corporate partners offer valuable business advice and insight; while government departments support the program through funding and procurements opportunities (for example, contracts for services provided by social enterprises).

As ACT Social Enterprise Hub manager Mandy Richards explained, setting up a business from scratch is no easy task, and for many community groups or organisations with a social conscience, it is often a financial minefield. The hub can offer specific services, such as how to set up a business plan; provide access to legal, accounting, marketing, financial management and human resources advice; or provide IT support.

The ACT hub is funded by ACT Health, The Snow Foundation and PricewaterhouseCoopers, with foundation partners including the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services ACT, the Mental Health Community Coalition and National Disability Services.

The Noah's Ark child-care centre was provided with a business mentor, Bruce Papps from Walter Turnbull, who guided the organisation through the process of setting up the centre.

“We knew we needed to develop an income-generating business,

date the Queensland hub has helped more than 40 social enterprises and resulted more than 50 new jobs for people who had previously been long-term unemployed. A second hub was formed in Parramatta in Sydney in 2007.

Both the Queensland and Parramatta hubs act as a focal point for a wider range of support services, including greater focus and discussion on the challenges within the regions.

But the ACT hub came up with the branding concept, “Social Enterprise – Thank you for

sustainable income stream as well as jobs and training opportunities for Canberrans struggling to enter mainstream employment,” she said. “The launch of this stamp is a huge milestone and a very exciting step in the development of social enterprise in Canberra, and in Australia on a broader level.

“From now on, Canberrans can look for the Social Enterprise stamp in a shop window, on a website, or on the product packaging, and know money spent with that business is supporting a worthwhile purpose and strengthening the local community,” she said.

And the opening of the new Noah's Ark child-care centre – the first to boldly show its brand – is just the tip of the social enterprise success.

Another two non-profit and community organisations will open for business within the next three months: an intriguing snail-breeding farm, and a cafe and catering business in Woden.

Another six businesses are expected to begin operating in the next 12 months.

Both Richards and Addison agree that the social enterprise system has had a wide reaching impact already.

Addison believes the Noah's Ark child-care centre addressed an obvious need in the local community and the Government provided support by redesigning the Rivett site specifically with the centre in mind.

“Rivett may have lost its school, and that was sad, but I think out of that something positive was created, a new long day-care centre that was desperately needed.”

*Canberrans can look for the Social Enterprise stamp . . . and know money spent with that business is supporting a worthwhile purpose.*



and child-care was a natural progression for Noah's Ark,” Addison said. “The Hub gave us the impetus to get started. The pro-bono work supported us through the legalities, planning, feasibility and business framework.”

The ACT Social Enterprise Hub was modelled on the successful Social Enterprise Hub in Queensland, set up in 2006. To

supporting social change”.

If it is received well here, it will be rolled out across the nation.

Richards said the launch of the logo was a crucial step in raising awareness and support for social enterprises.

“Social enterprises support the community on so many levels: first and foremost, they provide a quality product while creating a