

## My Journey Into Business: June 2014 Update

*I share, on subsequent pages, an article which I originally wrote for [EG Magazine](#) in July 2013 after running the Water and Enterprise Programme residential at Holt Hall. I wanted to take this opportunity to reflect on my experiences and to share what I have most enjoyed and learnt over the previous year. I am now moving towards studying History at Cambridge University in October 2014, where my business work will be carried out on a more seasonal basis to fit in with my studies.*

### Bright Futures Residential Programme – unique for a number of reasons...

Last February (2014), I facilitated the running of a similar style programme to Water and Enterprise entitled '[Bright Futures](#)'. This 2 ½ day residential programme was aimed at Year 7 – 9 students (so slightly younger students compared with previous programmes) and focused on energy reduction and real-life consultancy opportunities offered by Sheringham Shoal Offshore Wind Farm. Bright Futures was a unique programme for three reasons:-



Figure 1 The mentors on the Bright Futures Programme.

1. It used **energy and resource management as relevant contexts** to develop young peoples' knowledge and skills (principally teambuilding, leadership and campaigning)
2. **Mentoring took place at every level** with students of different age groups working together and supporting each other during the 2 ½ days.
3. The follow-up opportunities offered around real life paid evaluation consultancy work for the Sheringham Shoal Shoal Community Fund, will **provide students with experiences which will greatly enhance their aspirations and prospects towards further education and employability.**

### Real life evaluation consultancy work for Norfolk university and high school students...

My recent work has seen me jointly co-ordinate this follow-up to the programme, where UEA students work in partnership with high school young people to evaluate the impact of grants awarded from the [Sheringham Shoal Community Fund](#). This has been such an exciting follow-up from the programme, where everyone benefits; the university students, the high school students, Sheringham Shoal and finally the grant receivers. This provides a unique partnership with mentoring, advice and support taking place at every level. In addition, it is a perfect opportunity for students to further develop their skills, work collaboratively with different individuals and gain a flavour of entrepreneurship through paid consultancy work – all based on their experiences on programmes such as Bright Futures. We truly believe that being involved with such exciting, cutting edge work will contribute to brighter futures and prospects for young people in the region.

### A different residential programme – a wonderful opportunity to learn from others...

Another highlight of the year has been supporting the Marshall Scholar led [DESIGN Programme](#), centered around environmental arts as the context to develop skills. On this occasion, individual students (from a variety of schools) gave up time during their half-term to attend the programme at Holt Hall. The programme had much more of a 'camp' feel and as such focused more on the social side of a residential. The outcomes were remarkable, as many students from a variety of backgrounds had advanced in a multitude of ways; most notably, the increased confidence of more vulnerable young people when participating in a range of activities. Working with such talented individuals, and seeing the impact they had made on a diverse group of young people, was so inspiring. I personally learnt a huge amount which I hope to apply to further programmes, namely the integration of socially-focused informal learning

experiences together with more formal sessions, as well as enabling a greater freedom of choice for participants.

### **The next residential programme – transferring learning and building capacity...**

Our next Bright Futures Programme is taking place at Holt Hall from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> September – where we are hoping to provide a mix of the original Bright Futures with some of the more relaxed DESiGN environmental arts work, in order to enable the best fusion of ideas and approaches. Having someone else take the lead on bringing together the different parts of the programme, is vital for the sustainability and onward development of 'Bright Futures', and indeed Holt Hall, both as I move towards university and as the programme runs with greater frequency over the next academic year. I am thus very committed to supporting my colleagues on the next programme which will enable me to handover, support and learn in equal measure.



**Figure 2 Participants and mentors on the final day of the DESiGN Environmental Arts Residential programme.**

### **A personal reflection on this last year...**

This last year in business has been no different in terms of the huge amount I have learnt. This final year before university has given me the opportunity to work at different levels and as such further develop, hone and put into practice a variety of approaches when working with, and providing opportunities for, a range of young people. In particular, I find now that I am naturally evaluating the different initiatives I have been involved with and thus can change and adapt ideas with greater fluidity. Also, I have felt able to work even more independently in terms of moving forward opportunities for young people, at the same time as appreciating and valuing being part of a wider collaborative network. Experience of linked up, collaborative thinking and intricate relationships between both people and concepts has certainly been one of the most notable learning areas for me over these last three years!

### **A final note on the unique opportunity for Norfolk young people...**

To conclude this update, I would like to draw attention to [Norfolk County Council's Energy Strategy 'Towards 2020'](#) which I had the pleasure of shaping with a number of colleagues. The Carbon Reduction Mentor Fund is a particularly remarkable aspect of the strategy in terms of supporting, developing and ultimately rewarding young people for their specialist skills and knowledge in the growing area of resource efficiency. This fund is enabling what are arguably the most exciting parts of energy education; real life paid work opportunities in the growing area of the green economy which not only gives young people the chance to develop their skills and transfer their learning, but make a huge and long lasting impact in meeting current and future agendas, regionally and internationally. What I have been lucky enough to experience has now been enabled for a multitude of young people to take full advantage of; whether at school or university.

*I would like to extend a huge thank you to all those who have offered me various opportunities over these last 3 years. These very opportunities have hugely shaped my business work, my own thinking as well as my general 'life' approach.*

*In particular, I would like to thank fellow colleagues at Holt Hall, Norfolk County Council, SEEd, Sue Falch-Lovesey and my close family who have constantly supported, encouraged, enabled and ultimately empowered me to be where I am today.*



**Written by Cherish Watton, Eco Consultant**  
**[Cherish Watton Enterprises](#), June 2014**

## My Journey Into Business: Why I Would Never Look Back...

*This November, I will be coming up to marking my third year in business as Cherish Watton Enterprises. Over the past few years, I have been working with a number of organisations including Norfolk County Council and the RSPB as a 'young eco consultant', focusing on programmes around young people and the environment. I am currently on my third gap year before studying History at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge. This article takes you through my journey into business....and why I wouldn't have it any other way...*



### My Business

Before I share with you how I started my business, it would probably be useful to understand 'what I do' as Cherish Watton Enterprises. I specialise in three main areas:-

1. **Evaluation and advice from a young person's perspective on environmental / energy programmes.**

This has seen me evaluate a number of different projects, including the [Water and Enterprise Programme](#) (as detailed in previous articles) and the RSPB Mini-Minds Project (which inspired young people, aged between 13 and 16, to understand the value of their natural heritage, to step up and take action to preserve it). I am also a trained Eco Schools assessor, meaning I can award schools their Green Flag.

2. **Project management, development and co-ordination.**

During my three years in business, I have had growing experience in running different projects which centre around developing young people's skills in the area of carbon and water reduction, working with schools, the UEA and variety of organisations.

3. **Website creation and development.**

From a young age, I have always been interested in website design. Some of my recent work include websites for the [Norfolk Forest Education Network](#) and [Dereham Windmill](#) – using different software packages to meet different customers' needs.

So, as you can see, my business is made up of a number of different areas, which match my interests and passions, and allow me plenty of opportunity to further develop my skills. There is always something new to learn about...which is one of things I most enjoy about being self-employed...



### Back At School

I thought the natural next section to this article would be looking at the origins to my business...how did it all come about? Well, like many other young people, I was part of my school and college eco club, trying to reduce energy and encourage both students and staff to be more aware of how their actions would impact the environment around them. I found this work thoroughly enjoyable and was given a number of opportunities to share what our Eco Team at Northgate High School (in Dereham, Norfolk) was undertaking:-

- **We were invited out to a local primary school**, asking to speak to the children on the importance of environmental work in school.
- **We were also asked to present by Norfolk County Council, at a local Sustainable Schools Conference**, where we shared with others what we were doing at high school to motivate people to reduce energy.
- **Following this, a group of us were invited to put our energy reduction techniques into practise at County Hall, the main Norfolk County Council building.** We awarded offices green, orange and red certificates – and even now when I go back there to work, those green certificates are still proudly placed on those office doors!



I carried on this work when I went into college, working with older students and the National Trust to focus on a Big Switch Week – where we reduced energy consumption of Dereham Sixth Form College by 10%. There were a new set of challenges when working with older students, largely around the debates around climate change; and whether it was important to make the effort in the first place. As you can imagine, some lively debates ensued...



**Figure 3 Newspaper article in the local paper in Summer 2007, publicising our work at County Hall.**

## The First Gap Year



After attaining my A Levels in Summer 2011, I decided to take a gap year before going to university (a decision which was viewed somewhat controversially by some as that was the year the tuition fees were tripled). Nevertheless, I felt I needed a break from education; to get experience of working and have some time to myself. My first year started off working part-time as a clerical assistant at my old sixth form college; I learnt even more there about the importance of organisation – a vital skill in underpinning my whole business!

Meanwhile, the teacher who had been involved in supporting the Eco Teams at my high school and college shared that I was having gap year with Sue Falch-Lovesey, Head of Environmental and Outdoor Learning, who we had previously linked with in terms of our groups' environmental work. Sue came into college after my exams to discuss with me possible volunteering opportunities as part of the EU-funded [ANSWER project](#), in particular the Energy Ambassadors' Programme. This programme brought together talented and inspiring young people from Norfolk, Suffolk, Norway and Sweden to learn about ways to reduce energy, whilst also allowing them to gain a real insight into the cutting edge of the energy industry.



**Figure 4 Shelagh Huston (Chairman of Norfolk County Council in 2011) and Professor Tim O'Riordan (UEA) presenting certificates to those involved in the Energy Ambassadors Programme at Holt Hall in February 2011.**

Using my experiences in running energy campaigns at school, I became involved in the programme by putting together some aspects of the timetable for the three day residential at Holt Hall, in addition to helping develop some of the tools which students could use to measure their energy back in their schools. I also began to look how we could measure the success of the programme – my first steps into looking at evaluation. I worked with other people in the Environmental and Outdoor Learning Team to find out about some participatory evaluation methods which could be used with young people to collect their views on the programme – it was at this point that evaluation became a lot more interesting!

The three day programme was such a great experience; meeting other like-minded students and adults interested in energy reduction. I also learnt a huge amount about effective leadership and the different roles which were needed to make a team successful – the knowledge of which I have tried to integrate in my work ever since. We also visited Scira, the base for the

Sheringham Shoal Offshore Windfarm. We were given a thorough and informative introductory presentation to the wind industry, before having a tour of their premises! We had such exciting and innovative advancements in renewable energy taking place on our doorstep in Norfolk, areas which I (and many other young people) had not altogether appreciated before. (Following on from this programme, I was invited to on the Welcoming Committee to greet the Crown Prince of Norway when he officially opened the wind farm at Holkham Hall in September 2013.) At the end of the programme, I compiled together the results from the different participatory methods into my first evaluation document. I had such a positive feeling after the programme – seeing the students benefit in so many different ways and feeling inspired when they went back to their schools.

It was during the development of this very programme, that it was suggested to me that the work I was undertaking on a voluntary basis was of a standard where I could get paid. I could not be taken on by the Council as an employee, however I could be contracted in for specific areas of work, if I set up in business. I had never previously considered setting up in business when I left school, but after researching and gaining advice from a number of different sources, I set up my business in November 2011...



## Running My Business

The process of setting up my business was much easier than expected and did not require much initial investment, my service was based on my previous experiences in school / college as well as my thirst to take every opportunity to develop my skills and knowledge. I did need to update my technology and was able to do this within my first half a year in business, after submitting my first few invoices. I seemed to have come across a great situation, earning money for something which I was passionate about, without too much initial investment. I did have to work hard, but at the end of the day I felt like I was making a difference.

Following on from my initial work on the Energy Ambassadors' Programme, I became involved with other Norfolk County Council one day programmes around developing young people's understanding on renewable energy – I set up the project website and evaluated the young people's side of the programme. In the Summer of my first year in business, the Energy Ambassadors' Programme was the only young people's programme in the launch of the Green Economy Pathfinder Manifesto; a document outlining how Norfolk and Suffolk would transition to a green economy. With every new website and evaluation I produced, with every different conference I attended, I learnt something new; a new technique or approach which I could apply to the next piece of work I had.

I also started to become involved in more international projects, and after applying for funding to The Mason Trust, I travelled to Norway to present at the Learning Beyond the Classroom Conference at Dahlske High School in Grimstad. I presented to just under 100 Norwegian students and teachers with Malene Melbye, a 16 year old Norwegian who is a regional leader for the environmental organisation 'Nature and Youth'. I learnt such a lot from my three day visit and started to learn about the merits of other education systems.



After gaining experience of working on a number of programmes (with Norfolk County Council's

**Figure 5 Malene Melbye and I presenting at the Learning Beyond The Classroom Conference at Dahlske High School in Grimstad, Norway.**

Environmental and Outdoor Learning Team) and meeting other individuals through this work, I started to be approached by other organisations to design their websites or evaluate their programmes. This was making my customer base wider, working with a variety of organisations and people. This involved me thinking about setting rates for different pieces of work and looking at how I could effectively be involved with different projects, without taking on too much.

Looking back, this time was a particular learning curve, as I began to expand and think about the further development of my business. I remember at some stages feeling daunted – being a ‘one woman’ business, everything fell to me, from setting my rates, to delivering on the work, to filling in the tax return at the end of the year....however at each stage of the process, I was building my experience and learning something different.



## A Second Gap Year – “Will You Ever Go to University”?

It was in Summer 2012 that I decided to take another gap year – I was having the demand for my business to carry on and also used this time to apply to Cambridge to study History. This was an ambition I always had and wanted to ideally fulfill and felt that I was in the strongest position to go through the application process. Three months on from applying, I was notified that I had been accepted at Lucy Cavendish College, a college for female mature students over the age of 21. I had to be 21 in order to attend, which meant I could take one final gap year before going back to my studies...

During this second gap year, I further developed my business, I worked on a one year evaluation of a young people’s programme with the RSPB and took the best parts from the Energy Ambassadors’ Programme and became Project Co-ordinator for the Water and Enterprise Programme. At this time, I also became involved with national organisations such as Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEEd), where I met people from all over the country who were leading in this area – further opportunities to network, as well as develop my skills and experiences.



**Figure 6 Sharing the evaluation methods we would be using with the students on the Water and Enterprise Programme at Holt Hall in February 2013.**



## The Future – And Why I Wouldn’t Look Back

As I am approaching my final gap year before university, I am passionate about continuing to work on programmes which focus on young peoples’ environmental work and enterprise opportunities; so that when I am at university, there is a growing number of young people who can be commissioned to work in a similar way to which I am. I am so grateful for the opportunities which I have been given by a number of individuals throughout these two years....and ideally I want to do that now for other young people. Running a business has been such a wonderful experience for me; I have had the flexibility to take on different pieces of work for a variety of customers, whilst being able to earn money from something I feel passionate about. And the greatest feeling of all, is coming knowing that you have made a positive impact upon a young person and taken their thinking onto a whole new level...just like people have done for me...

