

Action Tutoring

City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones Case Study

First Interview – September 2015

Come August, Susannah will join the thousands of students across the UK in the nervous wait as GCSE results are finally revealed. Will she see the grades she's hoping for? Will all her hard work come to fruition? Yet Susannah isn't a teenager, nor did she sit any exams.

In 2011 Susannah Hardyman worked as an academic tutor in Greater London, supporting children with extra help to give them a strong foundation for academic and wider success. It was through this experience that she saw the impact that tutoring was having on tens of children.

At the same time Susannah was also involved in youth work in another part of London, with children from low-income families but with just as much potential and ambition life. It was only through this experience that she saw the impact that tutoring *could* be having on thousands more.

Roll on four years and Susannah in CEO of Action Tutoring, an education clarity that provides pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with high-quality tutoring to achieve their potential in school and beyond. Susannah now has a more formal summary of the problem that sparked her initial inspiration: "In 2014, the Department for Education published data showing that the national average rate of children achieving 5 A*-Cs was 65%, yet the average from low income families was only 32%. Action Tutoring exists to create a world where these inequalities no longer exist."

Since its creation Action Tutoring has grown from working in just two schools in London to over 60 schools in six cities. They now support 1,000 pupils a year, each of them getting at least one hour a week of tutoring across two terms from a trained and motivated volunteer in English and Maths. Yet this growth doesn't begin to cover the potential need for Action Tutoring's activities. An estimated 55,000 pupils from low-income families sit their GCSEs each year; that's more than a twenty-fold increase on the reach Action Tutoring is currently able to have.

And this is where social investment and the City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones fund comes into the picture. Operating in the current financial climate where grant income is ever more competitive, social investment offers Action Tutoring the opportunity to greatly up-scale its reach through access to significant funds and support. However even before they ventured onto the Stepping Stones fund, there was significant time spent on the shoreline, assessing the situation.

"I think I've had the idea of social investment explained to me three or four times" Susannah says, with both honesty and confidence. "But once we'd spoken with experts in the field including Bridges Ventures and Numbers for Good, as well as one youth charity who have recently received social investment, I was convinced that it was something we should begin to look into".

There were two criteria that she knew they met that made them a possible candidate for social investment. The first is the great financial cost of the educational status quo. The cost of leaving school without GCSEs and becoming NEET is an estimated £56,000 per young

person. For the 37,000 young people from low-income families that can be expected to leave school without 5 A*-Cs this amounts to more than £2bn. The financial rewards attached to initiatives that reduce these costs are ripe for social investment.

The second criterion is clear social outcomes. Action Tutoring is an organisation that aligns naturally to a set of definitive social outcomes: academic grades, further education, and future employment. However Action Tutoring can't simply align themselves to these outcomes. To be attractive to social investors they must demonstrate that they can deliver them, and deliver them consistently, repeatedly and at scale. And this is what they are using their Stepping Stones grant for.

Applying under the 'Capacity Building' strand, their eighteen month, £50,000 City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones grant will help them deliver three key changes to the organisation: increased quality of tutor training, increased reach and relationship with schools, and a structured tutoring curriculum with the ability to measure the progress of pupils both within their programme in academic success and beyond into further training and employment. This level of quality and impact data will enable Action Tutoring to build on its success, or, in Susannah's own words: "we want to know the formula for success".

As they embark on their social investment journey with Stepping Stones, Action Tutoring face a clear financial goal, to reduce their grant revenues from 80% to 50% in three years. Yet for Susannah this isn't the real achievement. For her it will be whether they can deliver a high quality tutoring programme that allows 90% of their pupils from low-income families achieve 5 A*-Cs including English and Maths.

She may not have sat any exams but there's definitely has a test ahead of her. Susannah will be just as nervous and excited as any teenager come GCSE results day.

Second Interview – February 2015

Action Tutoring's City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones project has been all about increasing quality: quality of tutor training, quality of tutoring resources, and quality in...well, their ability to measure quality itself. In any route to social investment, Action Tutoring know that quality is foundational.

Susannah Hardyman, CEO and Founder, explains the progress they've made in more detail: "The first big area of progress we've made is in volunteer tutor training. Our previous model was to train the tutors before they began. We now offer tutors the chance to receive ongoing training through weekly 'Bright Ideas' discussions at the end of their tutoring sessions. These enable them to reflect on their learning and pick up new teaching ideas."

The second area where they've seen a jump in quality is developing and rolling out a structured curriculum for students and tutors to use. They brought in Maths and English specialists to develop a curriculum that compliments students' in-school learning. Focussed on the one-to-one and interactive possibilities of tutoring models, they've already begun to get encouraging feedback on the resource.

The final area where Action Tutoring has used the funding is in their outcomes measurement. Susannah: "We previously collected the final grades of our students but we knew we needed to collect some interim measures of progress. We now have two additional measures. First we measure students' attainment in English and Maths at the beginning of the tutoring process. Second we measure student confidence, motivation and engagement in the tutoring process using a red, amber, green scoring system that pupils and tutors agree

together. There's been some trial and error in working out the best way to collect this information, but it's now embedded both into our process and IT with operational staff."

Susannah has already begun to see the value of improved outcomes measurement in testing the other areas of their development. "Our short-term measures show us that the new curriculum is making a difference. Student engagement is rising, and the process of a tutor discussing engagement with a student is enabling both sides to reflect and improve the relationship between the two". This measurement now has the dual purpose of both measuring progress towards final outcomes and making those final outcomes more likely.

These changes haven't come easily and there are still challenges ahead. Susannah has realised quite how hard it is to make a change within an organisation to a consistent and quality measurement of outcomes. However she is motivated to get it right because they want to ensure that the programme is as impactful as possible for the young people they work and because it holds the key to any possible social investment: "Having spoken with an organisation similar to ours who have received social investment, I know that quality systems, metrics and reporting is everything."

Action Tutoring's exploration of social investment readiness has been about key first steps of improving and measuring quality, and Susannah would recommend other organisations to take the same path: "When you see social investment as a series of small steps and beginning to get on the right track, it's much less scary."

Final Interview – November 2016

The aim of Action Tutoring's City Bridge Trust Stepping Stones project is to maximise quality of tutor training, resources and to be able to measure the impact on the young people & groups they tutor. Susannah Hardyman, CEO and Founder, discusses the journey since being on board the Stepping Stones project. "Since we last met 6 months ago we've made quite a few iterations to the program, in particular we learnt a huge amount last year with regards to what worked and what didn't with our resources and curriculum and so we spent a lot of time over the summer reshaping those". One of these areas, volunteer tutor training, continues to flourish, "we saw just over 40% of last academic years volunteers returning in the Autumn, a figure nearly double the previous year. To retain 40% felt like a really good step forward, it's enabled us to fill and deliver more programs than we ever have previously". One of the other areas of continued success has been the structured curriculum, a tailored curriculum designed to complement in-school learning which has seen all of Action Tutoring's schools take part in. It's popularity with both schools and volunteers has had a direct contribution to volunteer retention.

With regards to metrics and outcome measurement, Action Tutoring continues to place strong emphasis on measuring the quality of training & resources and now appears central to their methodology, "I think what's been really encouraging has been to see how on board the staff have gotten with metrics, everybody's very clear about what are key performance indicators are but most importantly why they matter, what difference do they make and they know how to respond." Says Susannah.

One of the slight difficulties is that of the outcomes framework 'it's perhaps taken longer than we thought, I think that's partly just because it takes a number of cycles to gather enough data to really be confident about whether it's giving you what you need. It's not been so much with our baselining and longer term outcome, but more the short-term measures that the pupils are on the right track that have proved a little harder to pin down."

In relation to whether there's been any deviation from their initial projected plan Susannah's clear about the significant impact of the government's curriculum changes but equally the benefits felt from the structured curriculums "the curriculum changes we've had to make have been enormous and so more work than anticipated, but on the flipside, our structured curriculums proved more popular to the schools than we might ever have imagined so it's definitely been worth that time."

Whilst there has been a continued level of successful benchmarks i.e., tutor training, retention and the popularity of delivered programs which Stepping Stones has enabled, Susanna retains a level of pragmatism regarding Action Tutoring's setup, "to be really confident about it we'd probably want to see another academic years GCSE' results, particularly with the new curriculum coming in. We were thrilled with the results of last academic year and in many ways, we're starting a fresh this year with a new benchmark so I think we'd want to see at least one or two years before we were really confident that we'd gotten this right."

Susannah is clear the Stepping Stones fund has been valuable to the Action Tutoring cause and is something she recommends other organisations to follow, "we knew when we first approached stepping stones that there was still a long way to go in really developing a strong model for our brand program and this funding has definitely got us significantly further down the track with that."

If social investment wasn't on the lips of Action Tutoring at the inception of this project, it's certainly, having implemented an effective metrics system and proven track record in delivering consistent levels of tutoring, a consideration now, as Susannah acknowledges, "talking to one of our other funders the other day they were saying they think we are in such a better position now for social investment than we were two years ago, we're very much keeping our eyes open and beginning to have some conversations with a few other organisations that might be interested in working with us on that."