

Keith Drew - Interim CEO Restructures and Transforms YMCA Forest

The YMCA is one of the UK's leading Christian charities and supports young people in times of need. The organisation reaches out to over 1 million young people each year, working with them at every stage of their lives, and offering support when and where they need it most.

Whilst the YMCA Movement has grown to become one of the largest Christian charities in the world, working in over 120 countries with 30 million members, on a local level, Forest YMCA is the largest direct access hostel in the United Kingdom. Nationally, the YMCA is the largest voluntary sector provider of safe, supported accommodation, and also offers health and fitness services for single, men and women aged between 16 and 35. It helps tackle crime and young offenders through its work with prisons and ex-offenders.



Keith Drew, Interim CEO

The YMCA also helps young people gain the skills they need to work and become independent by offering a variety of vocational, school and work-based learning opportunities. It has a range of services to help increase the employability and financial awareness of young people. It teaches citizenship to help young people fit into and participate in their communities, as well as promoting positive family relationships and providing childcare services.

The Challenge

Like many charities, Forest YMCA had focused more on service delivery than its business over recent years. As a result, whilst it was still performing good work, money was running out and its head office and its accommodation and facilities were all in need of transformation. If the charity was going to continue to operate effectively in the future, a major change was required. The charity also needed a new CEO to lead them and to deliver the changes.

Whilst searching for a new CEO, Forest YMCA contacted Russam GMS – a leading provider of interims managers in the non-profit sector - to find an interim replacement. The company recommended Keith Drew who had previously worked in several senior executive positions and his experience also included a five year period at a Christian Charity for Church of England Children's Homes in Sydney, Australia.

On 23rd of October 2006, Keith Drew began his assignment. He undertook a strategic review of the entire organisation and realised he had a major challenge on his hands

– change was needed in every part of the organisation.

Without cutting any of the vital services the YMCA provides, Keith was tasked with turning the charity into a viable business organisation and moving it from deficit into profit, whilst simultaneously raising standards. He put together a plan to restructure every facet of the organisation, which was accepted by a responsive and enthusiastic board of YMCA trustees.

Operationally, Keith split the organisation in two, creating a Welfare Division which focused on delivering services, and a Corporate Services Division focusing on internal back offices functions. Both divisions became accountable for their business operations while being integrated into a public facing organisation.

The Welfare Services Division immediately started to improve the services it offered, giving its 160 residents a dedicated entrance to their accommodation, which wasn't shared by the public and a 24 hour dedicated reception to cater for residents' needs day or night.

A major refurbishment programme is also underway, which will modernise the YMCA's accommodation, restaurant and sports facilities, which had not been updated for many years. By October 2007, the YMCA will benefit from new modern interiors providing a far higher standard of living for its residents, and for its public customers.

Keith has restructured many of the roles at the YMCA to focus more on service delivery. Resident support officers no longer have to deal with administration so they can work with residents full time; helping them to learn how to live independently and prepare them to leave the hostels to live independently, which is the charity's ultimate mission. He has appointed another resettlement worker which is also a major benefit for residents.

To help boost the morale of internal employees, the offices in Walthamstow are also being refurbished which will also reflect the new modern approach of the YMCA.

Charles Stokes, HR Director at

Forest YMCA commented, "Keith has brought a fresh perspective, direction and structure to the YMCA. He has focused on results and was able to assess our problems and fix them with remarkable speed. We are now looking like a modern charity with a long term future. Thanks to Keith, we are in a strong financial position to build on our charitable work and help more young people thrive in communities in the UK and around the world. Thanks to his remarkable job, we are no longer looking for a new CEO and we are delighted to have employed Keith for another 18 months."



Stephen Brooker, Chairman

Stephen Brooker, Chairman of the Charities practice at Russam GMS, commented, "Russam GMS was delighted to introduce Keith Drew to the YMCA and that he has made such an a major impact on the organisation in so short a time period. There is a growing need for people like Keith to work in the sector because they have great commercial awareness, leadership qualities and a technical skills set, finely balanced with an empathetic outlook towards the charitable sector. Keith's leadership skills and foresight enabled him to drive the YMCA forward and deliver the changes that were needed. He really demonstrated how effectively interim managers can work in this sector and how they can also transfer their skills to create long lasting organisational success."

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