

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE CASE STUDY:

BRAINWAVE CENTRE LTD

INVESTING IN PEOPLE TO DELIVER QUALITY RECRUITMENT

Size:	55 people
Sector:	Voluntary
Location:	Bridgwater, Somerset
Status:	Achieved Investors in People Standard in 2002 and Leadership and Management Model in 2004; reassessed for the Standard in 2005.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Impact

“Good staff morale and exemplary customer care are vital to our success. We couldn’t have achieved this without disciplined and structured business planning, training and communication processes. The Standard has underpinned our efforts so far and has given us the structure to help us grow from helping 70 families, to supporting over 300.”

David Davies, Chief Executive Officer

The organisation

Founded in 1982, Brainwave Centre Ltd is a registered charity that was set up to help children with Cerebral Palsy, genetic abnormalities or brain injuries that are dealing with Developmental Delay. Since its inception the Charity has helped over 1500 children with cognitive or physical difficulties. The aim of the organisation is to provide these children with skills to increase their independence.

Parents and children visit a Brainwave centre initially for two days of comprehensive assessment from Brainwave’s team of physiotherapists, teachers and other specialist staff. During this time they can make use of facilities such as a hydrotherapy pool, sensory garden and play area, exploratory room and quiet room.

From the assessment, Brainwave provides a tailored home-based therapy programme for the child aided by the parent, including exercises and structured play which can be carried out daily. The child is then reassessed four to six months later and changes are made to the programme as required. In this way each child has the best opportunity to learn the skills that will help them to unlock their potential.

The charity is supported by fundraising and donations. Major sponsors include the London Stock Exchange and the James Tudor Foundation, a charity that supports the relief of sickness. The current President of the charity is HRH, The Countess of Wessex.

The challenge

In the mid-nineties, Brainwave was experiencing some serious problems which threatened the very survival of the Charity. During this period, there were hardly any business processes in place and Brainwave's structure lacked any clear definition or controls. Between 1992 and 1995 Brainwave was led by a tripartite management team, however responsibilities had not been clearly outlined and this disrupted the decision making process. This problem was compounded by a lack of overall leadership.

Elsewhere in the organisation, training programmes had been sporadic at best and communications between teams had all but broken down. In particular, fundraising teams had little contact with the therapeutic teams and consequently potential opportunities to boost donations were being missed. Fundraising inevitably suffered and by 1995 Brainwave's balance sheet was looking extremely weak and staff morale had reached an all time low.

Brainwave had reached a critical turning point and a decision was made by the board of trustees to commit to a programme of long lasting change to safeguard the survival of the organisation and to ensure future growth. As part of this commitment David Davies was appointed as Chief Executive Officer and began work to get Brainwave back on track.

Davies recalls the condition of the organisation when he joined and explains, "Chaotic is the word that springs to mind initially, but I was confident that we had the strength and the will to pull things back from the brink. Brainwave was clearly ailing and a lack of structure had meant that we had lost control of vital operational processes.

"Our vision was unclear and because little strategic planning had been carried out, we had only a vague idea of where we were heading. Furthermore, decision making had become so fragmented under the tripartite senior management team, that it was no longer clear where overall responsibility lay. This had a significant impact on our fundraising efforts and by the time I joined we were already experiencing some financial difficulties. We therefore needed to take urgent action to improve our levels of profitability, so that we could repay borrowing and focus on future growth."

The strategy

Early on, Davies realised that Investors in People could act as an important driver to maintain and improve Brainwave's business planning processes, whilst also addressing other areas of weakness, such as communications and training. Davies explains, "There is a discipline involved in committing to the Standard and it serves as a valuable benchmark against which we can measure our progress and performance. We opted for Investors in People to help solve management problems and to develop an improved and proven structure."

Such were the difficulties facing Brainwave, that Davies recognised that only a long term approach would ensure success. He therefore decided to concentrate his efforts on business planning and put in place a five year strategic plan to re-structure and re-focus the organisation. Davies's detailed business plan, alongside a strategic document, outlined the future growth and development targets necessary to generate regular income for the charity.

For the plans to succeed, they had to be supported by specific training for people within the organisation, to make sure that they could confidently deliver against targets. An appeal to build a new hydrotherapy pool in 2002 provided an ideal opportunity to turn Brainwave's training goals into reality. Brainwave's therapists were trained in hydrotherapy and were also given sensory training. At the same time, fundraising staff were sent on external courses, with additional on the job training to help them to adopt best practices.

Along with regular training, the charity introduced a half-yearly individual review scheme to acknowledge the progress that its people were making. This process allowed each person to communicate their views and gain feedback on their performance. In addition, regular opportunities were created for teams to meet and communicate on a weekly and monthly basis. Monthly senior management meetings were introduced to help newly-hired senior managers to focus on the role of management itself. This would help Brainwave work towards the Investors in People Leadership and Management model, helping the charity iron out problems in its management processes.

Results

The strategy and business plan that Brainwave has adopted have prompted a real turnaround in the charity's fortunes. Davies comments, "We had previously overlooked the link between our fundraising and therapeutic teams who have close relationships with the families and children in their care. By improving communication between the two teams, we knew we could potentially encourage increased donations. We have since proved this

to be the case and the charity's financial position has improved as a result, with surpluses every year for the past eight years."

As the charity has expanded, staff have received training to match their ongoing needs, on-the-job performance has improved and staff retention is better than it has ever been. Increased donations mean that the charity's balance sheet has never been healthier. This has had a direct impact on the number of families the charity can now support. Currently 300 families are receiving support from the charity and this has grown from just 70 families in the mid-90s. There are plans to build on this growth further still, with a five year goal in place to support 750 families.

Brainwave's stable structure and profitability have also opened up opportunities for broader growth. Brainwave centres were opened in Ireland in 2004 and a new centre will open in Essex in 2007. It has also been possible to fund a satellite clinic twice a year in Scotland and to run a small London based clinic for orthodox Jewish families.

External perceptions of Brainwave have been boosted by the Standard and this has made recruitment easier and also reassured families that their children are receiving care from highly trained and valued staff.

Davies, who is an Ambassador for Investors in People, is delighted at the progress that Brainwave has made since it committed to the Standard. "Achieving the Standard focuses the mind on issues critical to your success such as training, communication and process. There is no doubt that the Standard has had a dramatic impact on our finances and the people in the organisation.

"In 1996 our balance sheet stood at just £170,000 and by 2005 it had grown to £1.7 million. We're all immensely proud of our achievements and having been successfully reassessed for the Standard in 2005, we are reassured that we are measuring up across the board and prepared for the future."