

SEN students create winning social enterprise

Students with complex needs mix business with creativity as they design and sell homemade products to raise money for local charities.

Sandside Lodge School in Cumbria caters for students from 2 – 19 years of age with high and complex learning needs. They joined the Giving Nation network in 2013, setting up three creative fundraising enterprises with fantastic results.



SLATE

Students were keen to support local causes that would directly impact the lives of those who live in their community. One group in particular felt strongly that, as their local community is near the sea, they wanted to support those who risk their lives for the safety of others. They identified the **Royal National Lifeboat Institution** as the beneficiary of any profits they made through their Giving Nation project.

The students decided to continue the focus on their local community and opted to use local slate to create quality products such as signs, placemats and plaques. They conducted **in-depth research**, visiting the local slate quarry to learn cutting techniques and considered their **product design, profit margins and marketing strategy**. They went into production with confidence, creating high quality items and attracting widespread customer interest.

These novices knew that they neither had the knowledge or resources to undertake this business venture by themselves, so they **contacted local businesses for help**. Many local firms donated time, goods, tools and other equipment to enable these budding entrepreneurs to launch this business with minimal overheads.

This small group of students made a profit of over £400 from sales of their products, which they donated to the RNLI. The school also ran two other projects—making and selling moneyboxes and cakes—which jointly raised a further £210 for **Macmillan Cancer Support** and the local hospice, **St Mary's**.

National recognition

Throughout their projects students at Sandside Lodge have shown commitment and determination. Despite the many challenges they face, they have created inspiring and successful business ventures which have made a real difference to local causes. They have been recognised both locally and nationally for their **business skills** and their **entrepreneurial spirit**—in their first year taking part in Giving Nation they received both the Cumbria County Council Social Enterprise award and the national Giving Nation Spirit Social Action Award.

'We are delighted to have been part of the Giving Nation project this year. Students and staff have enjoyed the process involved with the added bonus of helping their local community.'

Tim Brock,
Assistant Headteacher

