

## Students get families moving with innovative social enterprise

In 2012 a group of entrepreneurial students from Plymouth College launched an exciting new social enterprise producing a series of family friendly walking guidebooks - 'RailTrails'

With support from both Giving Nation and Young Enterprise, the project aimed to increase family cohesion and tackle obesity whilst also celebrating rural train branch lines. Each walk starts at a rural branch line and includes recommendations for local attractions, pubs and restaurants. The business-savvy group identified that this was the ideal product to be marketed in a recession, with walking being a free pursuit the only expenditure to the families was the price of the book.



### Planning and research

A good business plan was essential, as was market research; the team started by purchasing several books of walks to give them an idea of how to set out their books. Questionnaires were carried out to find out what families wanted from a book of walks and how much they would be willing to pay. The class split into three sub teams: one team devised the walks, one team wrote the text and maps, and the final team found retail outlets and arranged marketing and publicity.

### Publicising the business

The RailTrails team appeared on Radio Devon twice, on BBC Spotlight (South West) and gained coverage in two regional newspapers. They built a website and set up a Facebook page where people can track the RailTrails project and purchase one of their two published books. Celebrity endorsements have helped and the team has secured both Michael Palin and Chris Tarrant to recommend their books, which are currently on sale in more than 50 retailers across the South West.

'I've really enjoyed putting what we've learned in lessons into practice, in a real business situation.'

Student, Plymouth College



### Reinvesting the profits

As a social enterprise, the group needed to ensure that their profits were reinvested within the community and they took the decision to adopt a local train station. Having contacted First Great Western, their local network rail company, Gunnislake station in Cornwall was chosen. Profits made from selling the books are therefore reinvested in renovating and maintaining the station. The image on the left shows students starting work on new flower beds at the station entrance.

As of 2013 the business has sold 2,500 copies and made £1,800 profit. As the company grows so do the social benefits. With plans to promote stations all across Devon, Cornwall and even branch lines nationwide on the horizon, the future of RailTrails looks promising.