

Making change in Ramsey

Maurice Kendrick outlines the support he has received from Ramsey Million and UnLtd and the wider community benefit; October 2015.

Getting started

I had no clue about what Big Local or anything was about but I wanted to start my own business, my own newspaper, and it was suggested to me that I applied to UnLtd, and I got an initial amount of money just to start up.

Well I have been in and out of local newspapers almost since I left school, so 40/45 years or so. Lost my last job as an ad rep, selling advertising, I've worked local newspapers up and down the country, magazines, I've helped launch papers and I found myself unemployed. So I looked into the possibility and the feasibility financially anyway of launching my own newspaper. Some support from DWP to set up a new business and, as I say, I also applied to UnLtd for a Try It award.

UnLtd Award

I was given £500 as a Try It grant - went towards the costs of launching the newspaper. The £500 was quite welcome ... because the printing of the first edition was around £700 or £800 so it kind of gobbled that up really. And then I had the distribution, somebody to deliver it, and that was about another £400/£500 something like that. But, obviously I sold advertising in the newspaper so it wasn't all bad news. The first edition I think I probably did lose a little bit of money on it but it needed to be out there so that people could see it and they did. And in fact I can remember I launched a 32 page newspaper and it was a struggle to fill it, because people didn't understand this concept that we're going to have a new monthly local newspaper they were used to a bigger, regional type newspaper. My selling point there was, well, this is all going to be about news and views etc. that covered just your area. So every page will be about where you live, it will be about people you know and so on and so forth. ... And I remember thinking right, the first issue is 32 pages, I think I'm going to have to go down to 24 for the second issue because I struggled to fill 32, editorially and advertising wise. Boy was I wrong. The next issue went up to 40 pages.

And that's when it immediately started making money, not a lot of money but a little bit of money, and it was doing pretty well. And then I applied for the second UNLtd award - the 'Do It'. And that I got at the end of December 2014. Filled out the forms etc. and had a chat about it, told him how I was doing, what I was doing.

Rooted in the community

The good thing about producing a newspaper, and the same applied to also the Job Centre monies, was that you had to prove to them that what I said I was doing I was doing. Now ordinarily if it was any other kind of business I would have to probably take, I don't know, a balance sheet in there or whatever. All I did was take the

newspaper. And, in actual fact, the chap I used to see at the Job Centre he actually ended up working for me on a voluntary basis on the newspaper.

[The Unltd Advsiors] was very encouraging. We were obviously in touch via email and phone and what have you. I would never have started a newspaper I don't think without his help, to be honest. There are a lot of people I could have said that about as well [The Big Local worker] ... she even delivers the thing for me now in the village where she lives and ... they are all so pro the newspaper. It's brilliant the backing that they give me. And, in fact, I'm a bit of a celebrity now in this town. I used to be able to walk to my car in five minutes and now it takes me half an hour because people come up to me and they want to talk to me about stories, even if it's, 'Well done on the paper, it looks great this month,' and that sort of thing. So I know I'm doing something right. And something else which I've never heard before in all my forty odd years in local newspapers, I get people coming up to me and I can't remember how many people have actually come up to me and said, 'I read your newspaper from cover to cover.' Usually with regional press they don't and the reason for that is because regional press covers a bigger area. And places like ... the villages round here, they are kind of the poor relation to the regional press. And the people that live in this area ... they're interested in what is going on in their town. They want to read about their neighbour, they want to read about their friends, people they work with, they want to read about what is going on, what special events are coming up, that sort of thing. So from that point of view, that is why they read it from cover to cover because every single page is about their area.

Developing the business and the local newspaper

... I've since made it into a CIC, a Community Interest Company, so not for profit business. I feel very passionately about this area and the people that have supported me.

The older generation ... love it because a lot of these people .. don't have computers, they don't read it online or anything like that. And some of the youngsters read it. But it's not just that but I've also got young people involved with it as well. ...I was approached by a young lady who wanted to go on to university to do media studies and eventually into journalism and I nearly snatched her hands off because I thought what's the best way to get young people to read a local newspaper? Get young people to write for it. I said I'll give you your own column. Well, you'd think I'd given her a million pounds. One particular month I left [the] column out. Anyway, the following month she contacted me and she said, 'I've got to write the column The amount of people I had coming up to me saying what's happened She didn't realise that that many people read it. So she still writes even though she is at uni.

I'm not looking to be the next Rupert Murdoch. All I really want to do is give this area what I think they deserve, their own local newspaper, which I know that they love. I get so much support from them. It gladdens my heart really when I speak to people and they say, 'Oh yeah, I read your paper, it was really good.