

Hollywood actor Michael Sheen spends Friday evening with young social entrepreneurs in East London

Hollywood actor Michael Sheen spent his Friday evening (Friday 22nd February 2019) in East London getting to know social entrepreneurs from Bow based Social Ark, a community based Social Enterprise.

The visit was organised in partnership with Social Enterprise UK where Sheen is a Patron. Social Ark founder, Lisa Stepanovic had reached out to Sheen via Twitter to ask he come and see how a working-class community is putting the social enterprise model to work, not just for their own organisation, but for the people in their community who go on to set up their own businesses as a result of the support provided by Lisa and the Social Ark family.

Sheen is an actor with numerous stage, film and TV credits to his name. A few include; The Queen, Caligula, Frost Nixon and Hamlet. This year he'll be seen in The Good Fight and in Good Omens with many other productions on the way. Sheen was in London during a break in filming of The Good Fight. Sheen had previously expressed an interest in how the social enterprise model could be used by communities seeking to “take back control”, particularly those with strong working class roots and in the post-industrial communities of South Wales.

Peter Holbrook, Chief Executive, SEUK, said:

Social enterprises like Social Ark create opportunities for people that need them most. One in three social enterprises work in the most deprived communities in the UK and Social Ark is a shining example of the social enterprise ethos. It is focused on providing solutions, building relationships within in communities and sticking with people in tough economic circumstances.

The level of passion and support that Lisa gives the young entrepreneurs is truly inspiring and she is fostering the next generation of leaders in business. We are not doing enough to tap into the diverse range of talent and creativity in our society, but Social Ark's work is helping to correct that.

Lisa Stepanovic, Founder and Chief Executive, Social Ark CIC, said:

Knowing that Michael Sheen was patron of Social Enterprise UK, I invited him to meet the Social Ark family. Many organisations claim they've created a 'family', but we really have. What makes us unique is that not only do we provide exceptional business development and learning, we also ensure our young entrepreneurs access individually tailored, wrap-around support. We know that no matter how brilliant a business idea is – if an individual is weighed down with personal baggage and problems, their ideas will struggle to take off.

Our entrepreneurs constantly tell us that they don't want, or need, to be 'cured' or 'fixed' by people that have 'never walked a day in their shoes'; they want the tools and support to fix themselves. Using their lived experiences, they build solutions to their own communities' issues. This type of grassroots social entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated. The impact is far-reaching – instilling hope, pride and aspiration.

It was crystal clear that Michael deeply understands the many pressures experienced by working class communities, and the importance of them leading their own change. It was a great honour for Michael Sheen to give up his Friday evening to spend it with us.

Michael Sheen, Actor and Patron of SEUK, said:

“Social Ark is a brilliant example of how working class communities can use the social enterprise model to take back control in their communities. As Patron of Social Enterprise UK it’s exactly the sort of example I wanted to see and now I hope to share their story with communities across the UK. Everything I saw on my visit demonstrated that real grassroots change is possible when the resources and tools social enterprise can provide, are matched with the determination and passion of individuals who have the lived experience of the inequalities they seek to change. It was a huge privilege to spend my Friday evening with the family of social entrepreneurs and their founder Lisa Stepanovic. The impact Lisa and Social Ark is making is saving lives and will clearly lead to many of the young social entrepreneurs becoming the next generation of community leaders.”

