

**The Phone Co-op wins top honour at
10th Annual Enterprising Solutions Awards**

Winners of the Enterprising Solutions Awards (ESA) were announced at a gala awards ceremony in London on the evening of 20 October. The Best Social Enterprise Award, and a cash prize of £10,000, went to **The Phone Co-op**, the UK's only telecommunications co-operative.

The other winners were **CEiS**, **NMC Design + Print** and **The Wise Group**, who each received £5,000 each, as did **Sunlight Social Enterprises CIC**, the winner of Best New Social Enterprise.

Fyndoune Community College was the first winner of the newest award, Best Social Enterprise in Schools, and received a £1,000 cash prize.

The ESA are designed to find and reward the UK's most successful and innovative social enterprises – businesses that tackle a social or environmental need.

The Phone Co-op has been hugely successful in a competitive market, and has enjoyed a steady growth over the past ten years – it now has 15,000 customers, a share capital of £2 million and a turnover of £7.5 million.

Based in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, their main offices are in a converted farm in the countryside and they also have an office in Manchester. They apply ethical and environmental policies to all aspects of the business, including operating a transparent pricing policy and promoting greener travel.

The Phone Co-op is keen to spread their success around - it has set up two separate funds to support the growth of new and developing social enterprises.

Vivian Woodell, CEO of The Phone Co-op, said “We are truly honoured to receive this award. The Phone Co-op set out to prove that the co-operative model could be applied in an industry which is now a fundamental part of modern society. Our success and continued growth demonstrate that consumers and businesses alike are increasingly interested in using suppliers with a fair and sustainable approach to business.”

Jonathan Bland, chief executive of the Social Enterprise Coalition said: “For the Phone Co-op to thrive and continue to grow in such a competitive market demonstrates the power of a business model that operates on the core values of quality, community and sustainability.

“All of this year's winners are a testament to what can be accomplished when innovation and responsible business are combined to deliver solutions to people and communities, something that today's economy reminds us is absolutely essential.”

Kevin Brennan, Minister for the Third Sector, said: “In my previous job at the Department for Children, Schools and Families it was clear to me the difference social enterprise can make to the lives of our young people. I am now relishing the chance to see the real impact that has been made across the age gap and across communities where this movement has really made its mark.

“This year's winners of the Enterprising Solutions Awards provide yet more inspiring examples of the innovative, often unique ways in which someone can make our country better by combining social drive with real business acumen.”

[CEiS](#) (Govan, Scotland) is a leading enterprise support agency that for the past 24 years has been providing business support, advice and financing for social enterprises in Scotland. In September 2008

they worked with a network of international partners to develop and deliver the first [Social Enterprise World Forum](#) in Edinburgh.

[NMC Design+Print](#) (Winsford, Cheshire) is a successful design company established 17 years ago by the Neuromuscular Centre (NMC) to address social exclusion and lack of employment faced by people with neuromuscular conditions. 80% percent of employees have a neuromuscular condition, and surpluses are reinvested in the NMC which provides a range of services including physiotherapy, training and support.

[The Wise Group](#) (Glasgow, Scotland) has been helping unemployed people find and keep a job through a range of support, training and work experience programmes for the past 25 years. Since 1984, it has helped over 25,000 people from across Scotland and the North East of England move into employment.

[Sunlight Social Enterprises CIC](#) (Gillingham, Kent) is a community driven social enterprise set up to tackle health and social inequality. It was founded in 2006 and manages six different social enterprise businesses that offer a variety of employment and learning opportunities to local people including five catering businesses, a radio station and recording studio.

[Fyndoune Community College](#) (Durham) runs a social enterprise called Water Works, founded by pupils in 2005 to fund a well in Ghana through the sale of bottled water. Originally the brainchild of ten pupils, Water Works has expanded and now involves all 420 of its pupils. Another enterprise, pPod, started at the school in September 2007 – it's a land-based business which encourages young people and members of the local community to work together on farming allotments, and then sell the produce at a farm shop.

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Notes to Editors:

- For more information please contact Caroline Borge, senior press officer at the [Social Enterprise Coalition](#) on **0774 369 3040** (m) or 020 7793 2318 (o) or at caroline.borge@socialenterprise.org.uk.
- The awards are run by the Social Enterprise Coalition on behalf of RBS and the Cabinet Office, and sponsored by BT, Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Communities and Local Government and Social Enterprise Magazine.
- The Social Enterprise Coalition is the UK's national body for social enterprise. Acting as the voice for the sector, it supports and represents the work of its members, influences national policy and promotes best practice. www.socialenterprise.org.uk
- Social enterprises are dynamic businesses with social and environmental aims. Well known examples include The Big Issue, Cafédirect and Jamie Oliver's Fifteen, but there are many other social enterprises operating in a wide range of industries from farmers markets and recycling companies to transport and childcare providers.
- According to figures from the Government's Annual Small Business Survey 2005 and existing data for the social enterprise sector, there are at least 55,000 social enterprises in the UK with a combined turnover of £27billion per year.