

Shared Interest Quarterly Return

Summer 2010

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Keeping the Faith

Our Supporter Relations Officers (SROs) have found from their dedicated work with faith groups, community groups, schools and businesses, that it is the faith groups in particular who prove proactive, especially in terms of future partnerships.

In a bid to spread the word about our work, we are hoping that the commitment many faith groups already demonstrate towards the fair trade movement will help encourage more people to take that extra step by becoming Shared Interest members.

In addition to meeting with faith groups we have also aligned ourselves with the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) with the intention of creating a strategic partnership that will increase awareness across a broad audience.

Sally Reith, SRO for the South East recently interviewed Miles Litvinoff, Coordinator of ECCR, to find out more about the organisation and how he sees the relationship with Shared Interest growing.

Miles, for the benefit of our members can you tell us a little about ECCR and the work that you do?

ECCR is a church-based investor coalition and membership organisation working for economic justice, human rights and environmental sustainability. We work principally through research, advocacy and dialogue with companies, faith communities and institutional investors to promote higher standards of corporate responsibility and transparency.

Have you been part of the organisation since the beginning?

I joined in 2005, so fairly recently. The organisation has been running since 1989 and whilst we have had welcome support from Christian Aid, CAFOD, the Rowntree Trust and other donors, we have achieved much of our success with slim resources through the dedication and commitment of our members, many of whom worked for the organisation in a voluntary capacity.

In 2005 however, we were left a significant legacy, and this money enabled the organisation to take on more paid staff. We are now a team of four. This increased capacity means we've been able to make better contact with our members, with potential members and with other church and civil society groups, allowing us to undertake a wider range of research and advocacy.

What inspired you to join the organisation, do you come from a religious background?

I don't come from a specific religious background but I believe that ECCR's values are universal. Although many of the people in ECCR have a Christian background this is by no means a requirement of the organisation. For me ECCR's position as an interface between businesses, human rights and environmental sustainability was instantly appealing.

Prior to my current role I had worked for a variety of NGOs including Amnesty International and One World International, and as a writer and editor on human rights and environmental justice issues. For a long time I had been concerned about money, economic and financial systems. I was uncomfortable with the way businesses impact human rights, especially the rights of those in the developing world who do often lack access to a political voice. As a result I have been a supporter of fair trade for a number of years.

As I am sure many Shared Interest members will agree, this started with the purchase of Fairtrade tea and coffee and grew and grew. Research for my book, *50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade* led me to Shared Interest and I have been a member since 2005.

The fair trade movement has definitely expanded over the last 20 years and it is great to see such an uptake in interest especially from schools and cities; even landmarks I believe, as Hadrian's Wall recently acquired Fairtrade status.

I think that overall I am only happy working for an organisation to which I can fully commit and enthusiastically endorse its values. Luckily ECCR joined together many elements that I am passionate about and I look forward to developing ECCR and its relationship with Shared Interest.

Obviously you have a personal commitment to fair trade but what is ECCR's stance on the subject?

Whilst we don't have a specific stance on fair trade it is something that our staff and members feel passionately about. Traidcraft Exchange is one of our longest standing corporate members and with the addition of Shared Interest we hope to increase our commitment to fair trade.

For a long time ECCR has focused on the negative impact of conventional trade. However, moving forward we have a new strategy which includes seven priority issues, one of which is Positive Impact Investment. Through this we aim to advocate ways that investors can positively use their funds to support initiatives such as fair trade, micro-finance, community enterprise and clean technology. This is relatively new territory for us but we are excited by the project's potential.

On a personal level, I would very much like to see fair trade become the model for all forms of business so that nobody is exploited by the global economic system - everybody gets a decent living out of it and it's not destroying anyone's livelihood.

If you would like to find out more about ECCR visit their website at www.eccr.org.uk. Similarly if you are interested in introducing your faith group to Shared Interest contact the Supporter Relations Team for more information on how to arrange presentations and newsletter articles.

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