

*“...the centre is helping to build community cohesion, to rekindle education and creative ideas in community members. It has generated a sense of enthusiasm on the streets, and people can now interact and get to know each other.”*

Georgie, co-founder of the  
Southern Quarter Development Group



## a valuable community asset

The Far Cotton and Delapre community centre has up to 500 users each week, offers affordable space for several community group activities and is the base for the Southern Quarter Development Group (SQDG), a social enterprise which puts the community at the heart of its business.

It's often difficult to get community activists to talk about themselves, and Georgie and Lesley, the founders of SQDG, are no exception to the rule. For Lesley “it's not a job, it's a way of life”.

For Georgie and Lesley, their passion is their community. They decided to start SQDG Ltd at a time when the inspirational headmaster of the school in which the centre is based passed away. They brought together the residents association, the primary care trust, the local council and other active groups in the area to sit on the board of the newly formed social enterprise.

After much feasibility and public consultation work was undertaken, SQDG began to build up community youth services and grew over the years from there. When Local Alchemy was brought into Delapre, Carolyn, the coach, assisted Georgie and Lesley in their attempts to bring in funding to develop a substantial community centre.

The coach was able to help them to explore ideas for the centre from the community, for getting businesses on board, providing emotional support in the difficult times, and for expertise and skills that were needed to bring the project together. For Georgie, “Local Alchemy allowed us to strive to do things that otherwise would have been impossible. We both like working with people, and have gained the business skills we need from the coach”.

Between 2000 and 2006 £1.8m was raised. The majority of the funding came from *emda*, with the Northampton County Council providing some resources for the library, and the primary care trust contributing to the clinic, which caters for the elderly and provides maternity care as well as other general healthcare facilities. The healthy eating collaborative of the Big lottery fund provides £25k each year for the local Food Hub, based at the community centre.

The new community centre will bring in many new community benefits, according to Georgie. “There are lots of lonely people out there and the community centre is a place that welcomes you, not just rooms for hire”. It's a practice facility for sport groups, a creative workspace for artists, a networking base for the Local Alchemy coach to meet with entrepreneurs, a learning centre for children's school activities and a centre for well-being with healthy eating courses for the elderly. Volunteers who help to run the centre “go on to bigger and better things” according to Lesley.

Georgie and Lesley understand the need to balance making the community centre self-sustaining – always a challenge – with keeping it accessible to those who find it difficult pay. The key, says Georgie, “that you work through the community; a community centre is no good without the people that use it”.

The community centre and the adjacent community rooms, are now operating at near capacity, with over £34Kpa being generated from the centre.