

# Progress in Practice

## North West NHS Suppliers Bureau

Following a successful pilot project involving 21 suppliers and Wirral Hospitals NHS Trust, the North West NHS Suppliers Bureau has been established to offer training to help small enterprises be more successful in securing local NHS contracts

### Summary

In 2002-03 the Fruit Shed – a fruit and vegetable distributor based in Knowsley – took part in a three-year Health Action Zone Employment pilot project called Health and Safety @ Work in Wirral. The project's aim was to improve health and safety in small- and medium-sized enterprises to help them meet NHS supply chain standards and win future NHS contracts. The project was a partnership between Wirral Hospitals NHS Trust (who deliberately identified the Fruit Shed and other small local suppliers to take part in the project), Groundwork and 21 local businesses. The project was also supported by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency.

As a small company, employing just five people, the Fruit Shed had minimal health and safety procedures before the project. With support from Groundwork, Ian Parkin – the owner of the Fruit Shed – has made a number of health and safety improvements, and both Ian and his staff have gained health and safety qualifications.

The company has now won a prestigious health and safety award through the Wirral Investment Network, as well as securing a number of lucrative contracts.

(continued overleaf)



Implementing health and safety measures can prove time consuming and difficult, due to the everyday pressures of running a small business, but Ian Parkin (pictured above) believes the scheme has been highly beneficial to the Fruit Shed:

*“My investment in health and safety has boosted the morale of staff and given them a new sense of worth and value in the workplace.”*

### Contact:

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## *Progress in Practice*

Overall it is estimated that the Health and Safety @ Work in Wirral pilot scheme has boosted the business of local firms involved with the NHS from £830,000 to approximately £1.4 million.

Following on from the pilot, a North West NHS Suppliers Bureau has been established, to help small- and medium-sized enterprises and other organisations to be more successful in accessing local NHS contracts.

The Bureau is run by a partnership between the NHS, Groundwork Environmental Business Services and local business, and it is funded by the North West Development Agency (NWDA).

It will work initially with enterprises across Cheshire and Merseyside to offer training on health, safety, environmental issues, NHS tendering procedures, rules of the Official Journal of European Communities (OJEC – where public sector contracts are advertised), and e-trading.

Suppliers will receive a qualification to enable them to demonstrate the competences they have developed, and accredited suppliers will be added to a database that will be available to all NHS bodies and local authorities in the north west.

**Pat Broster of Groundwork Environmental Business services feels that the Bureau will offer a major boost to local suppliers:**

*“The ultimate aim of the project is to adopt a local sourcing policy with accredited suppliers. This means SMEs will need to improve their health, safety and environmental performance, which can be achieved with our support.”*

**Sue Henry from the North West Development Agency said:**

*“We are delighted to support the NW NHS Suppliers Bureau. It is increasingly recognised that NHS spending can play a major role in economic regeneration, and in the north west alone last year the NHS spent £1.5 billion on goods and services, yet at present less than one third of this is spent locally. We think this project can make a major difference.”*

**Links and organisations involved:** For more information about the North West NHS Suppliers Bureau, contact Pat Broster at Groundwork Environmental Business Services (see below), or visit Merseyside Business Environment Network website – [www.merben.org.uk](http://www.merben.org.uk). The Fruit Shed is based at Acorn Business Centre, Lees Road, Knowsley Industrial Park, Knowsley, L33 7SA – to find out more contact [thefruitshed@hotmail.com](mailto:thefruitshed@hotmail.com). The NW NHS Suppliers Bureau is funded by the North West Development Agency – see [www.nwda.co.uk](http://www.nwda.co.uk).

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