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The Wonder Workshop

“I can’t believe you’re leaving Elly” Harriet said as she smiled and gave Elly a good-bye embrace, “What are we going to do without you?”

It was a warm tropical evening at the Wonder Workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for workshop coordinator Elly Smith’s going away party. Harriet and all of the Workshop’s 33 workers had come, along with founder Paul Joynson-Hicks and collaborator Chris Weinberger.

“Don’t forget to write us; send us a post card from Australia” Roma said with a big grin as he held Elly’s hand. “I’ll miss you all,” Elly said, as she raised her glass for a toast, “Here’s to the long life and success of the Wonder Workshop.”

Long strings of little white lights lit up the veranda of the Workshop where everyone socialized. Many of the workers had brought their families, and with the babies asleep on a mattress inside the door, the celebration lasted late into the evening. As the workers left, they shuffled on their hands, crutches or canes to their hand powered three wheeled tricycles that were parked together in a jumble inside the gate of the compound. Harriet and Roma, like almost all of the craftspeople at the Workshop, were disabled, most having contracted polio as children which had left them crippled with limited use of their legs.

Harriet for example, had contracted polio in her village when she was 12 years old and was sick for 5 years before her family discovered that she had polio. Before joining the Wonder Workshop in March 2006, Harriet had only ever begged along the road. Some months she would only make 5,000 Tanzanian schillings (\$5) and days when she would return home with no money her family would have to sleep without eating. She also suffered from being attacked by city council police and would sometimes be put in jail for a week at a time for begging on the streets. Similarly, Roma was born in a village near Kigoma with a disabled right leg and then his left leg was affected due to sickness as a child. He did not know the cause as his parents did not take him to hospital as they believed in traditional healers. When he was old enough, Roma first sold sweets and cigarettes on the road in his village where he was able to save some money to try the same business in Dar es Salaam. However, the city council police damaged his business, destroyed everything and chased him away. It was then that Roma decided to begin begging. On a normal month, begging would bring in 20,000 – 30,000 Tanzanian schillings (\$20-\$30) for Roma, but some months could see much less or sometimes more. As working age people, Harriet and Roma each had five dependents that they supported at home. (See Appendix A for profiles of four other Wonder Workshop workers.)

Wonder Welders

The idea for the Wonder Workshop had come from Paul Joynson-Hicks, a professional photographer from England who had lived and worked in East Africa for many years.¹ Paul's Blue Mango Photography Studio was in his comfortable house on the Masaki Peninsula where the majority of expatriates and wealthy Tanzanians lived. Paul also had some background in charitable fundraising, having organized a football club for street kids in Uganda and an annual Charity Goat Races fundraising event in Tanzania.²

On a regular basis, Paul drove by the junction of Haile Selassie Road and Ali Hassan Mwinyi Street on his way to and from his studio. It was at this junction that handicapped people gathered to ask for money from people stopped at the light. Paul had gotten to know many of the people there as he chatted and bantered with them on a regular basis. Some of the people, Paul knew, enjoyed the freedom from the demands of a job if they could make enough money to get by on and didn't have dependents to support at home. Others were there only as a last resort and were in need of some help and direction.

One day in early 2004, Paul - bored with doing his accounting - went out to the back of his workshop and welded up a giraffe out of bolts and an ashtray out of an old tap. They were much appreciated as presents and Paul got to thinking that perhaps the some of the people at the traffic lights could weld art objects which could be sold in Dar es Salaam and provide a self-sustainable income. So Paul called in three of the beggars that he knew well - Michael, Ernest and Bahati - who were extremely keen to try it out. So with \$1,000 donated by the Charity Goat Races committee, Paul bought a welder, metal cutter, grinder and safety equipment and paid for the month-long training of the three men in making welded art objects and animals from scrap metal. The Wonder Workshop was born (initially as the Wonder Welders) and founded on the mission *"To provide a self-sustainable income for handicapped men and women through creating art objects, employing handicapped people who are begging, improving self-esteem and mainstreaming handicapped people into society in a positive way."*

In the beginning, items were sold through Paul's friends and contacts at his studio cum workshop and some were carried by a shop in Dar es Salaam. The three (and soon seven) men that Paul trained in welding were able to earn an income of \$50 per month as an allowance from Paul that was mostly paid for by sales from the sculptures and animals, which sold for between 8,000 - 150,000 Tanzanian schillings (US\$10-\$50) each.

Paul's idea was being well received by the workers and new customers so Paul asked metalworking artist Heather Cumming to come to the Wonder Workshop to work with the welders on artistic designs.³ Heather accepted, and in January, 2005, Heather traveled to the Workshop from her home in Scotland and stayed for two months to work with the welders. Heather taught them to make elegant artistic animals and other sculptures out of scrap metal (see appendix B for illustrative examples of Wonder Welders designs and products that Heather influenced). She also taught the welders how to look at pieces of scrap metal creatively to determine which animal would be best suited for it. Heather, Paul and the welders worked toward a big launch exhibition for the Wonder Welders which was held on March 11, 2005. On the day, over two hundred people came and the workers sold everything, raising over \$4,000.

Elly Joins the Workshop

It was at this time, February 2005, that Elly had joined the Wonder Workshop. Elly had arrived in Tanzania at the end of January from Uganda with her husband who worked as a tax consultant and had been transferred.

Elly had trained as a textile designer in university in the UK. After graduation, she had backpacked around the world where she met her husband Harry. Together they traveled to India, where Elly worked with a fabric company and then back to the UK where she worked for a fair trade textile company. When Harry got a job in Uganda, Elly went with him and started a paper project using recycled fibers. When Harry transferred to Tanzania, Elly quickly learned about the Workshop and contacted Paul. Paul showed Elly around the Workshop just as they were busy preparing for the March 11 launch. Heather Cumming was about to return to Scotland and with the workshop growing he offered Elly the job as coordinator of the new Workshop.

Elly quickly began work, investing the cash from the launch into training more handicapped welders and continuing to grow the Workshop. At this time the Workshop's average turnover was \$2,000 per month and the shop employed seven welders. With a full-time coordinator on board, word continued to spread around Dar es Salaam and beyond about the quality work and designs of the Welders. Orders from shops increased and commissions started coming in.

Under Elly's leadership the Workshop moved from Paul's backyard into its own permanent workshop on May 1st, 2005, and was officially registered as a Tanzanian non-governmental organization in August of that year. The Workshop was organized into a cooperative where everyone associated with the workshop – the welders, Paul and Elly - were employee-members. Elly began instituting regular monthly meetings of all the workers to resolve problems and plan for the future.

Paper and Soap

With an additional \$3,000 donated from the 2005 Charity Goat Races, Elly wasted no time in establishing paper-making from recycled materials as a second workshop activity. Elly had started a paper making project in Uganda and Elly's background in design helped ensure the new product line was well received. Her artistic background also contributed to the marketing of the welded products as well. By the end of 2005 the Wonder Workshop had grown to employing 11 employee-workers and was bringing in about \$4,000 per month in sales. The next year, 2006, Elly introduced all-natural soap made from Tanzanian oils and spices to the Wonder Workshop portfolio.

Wooden Toys

It was this year that saw Christopher Weinberger, a volunteer from the US, train five disabled men how to make handmade wooden toys from renewable Tanzanian wood sources, and bring them into the Wonder Workshop cooperative. Chris had been in Tanzania as a volunteer and had been working with Nico, a local carpenter, on making beautiful hand-made wooden toys in his garage for fun. A carpenter himself, Chris knew that many valuable tropical hardwoods grew in Tanzania, but he was concerned over sometimes illegal clear-cutting and the shipping of the unprocessed wood overseas for processing, leaving little local value added or valuable forests for future generations. Chris wanted to train local carpenters to make the toys so they could earn a living as many gifted woodworkers were giving up their trade to become taxi drivers. Together,

Chris and Elly decided to add the wooden toys to the Wonder Workshop portfolio and were able to secure some money from a UK trust fund to buy the machinery and woodworking tools necessary to launch production. It was then that Chris and Nico worked to train five additional disabled former-beggars in making the wooden children's toys using off-cuts and sustainably harvested Tanzanian hardwood.

Glass

Elly continued expanding the Workshop in early 2007 when she established glass making from recycled coloured glass containers as a new line of enterprise. Four Wonder Workshop workers were trained by Ghanaian glass bead makers who were visiting Tanzania.⁴ The workers then returned and set up bead making at the Wonder Workshop.

The Business Model

With the expansion of the workshop beyond welding to include paper, wooden toys, soap and glass beads, Elly had taken the Workshop from an informal group of welders in the backyard of Paul's photography studio to a team of 33 artisans trained in five different product lines, and generating annual sales of \$80,000 (for an organigram, see Appendix C).

"Hip Recycled Art" was now the Wonder Workshop tag line, and all of their products were made of recycled materials or otherwise sustainably sourced. There was a truckload of scrap metal of all sizes and shapes donated from Toyota; paper products were made from recycled newsprint and banana leaf fibers grown locally; the glass jewelry was made from melted bottles, the soap and candles from natural Tanzanian oils and spices, and the wooden toys from scraps or sustainable grown wood. All of the materials were sourced locally in Tanzania.

A key to the success of the Wonder Workshop had been its focus on quality artistic design in all of its product lines. All of the ex-pat workers and volunteers have been designers or artists including Elly, Chris (wood), Heather (Metal), and Paul who primarily works in photography. With only a handful of notable exceptions, the local mass production of Tanzanian tourist souvenirs was uninspiring, with thousands of the same carved giraffes and painted savannah scenes being produced for the market. With so much design and artistic guidance, the trained craftspeople at the Workshop produced unique, interesting works of art which was in significant demand and could demand a price premium from tourists, the ex-pat community and at the major annual craft fairs.

At the Wonder Workshop, all of the craftspeople receive a monthly salary of between \$60-\$75 plus a \$10 monthly transportation allowance. Three able-bodied foremen - Saidi Omari who managed the welders, Nico Ngalawa who managed the wood shop and Mariana Mahinya who managed the paper workshop - each earn about \$170 per month including transport allowance. Elly as Workshop Manager earns \$500 per month. Each employee has one month of paid holidays a year and 2 sick days per month.

In addition to their base salary, the Wonder Workshop instituted a bonus incentive system based on 5% the selling price for items when they are sold (or with a wholesale customer, after payment has been received). The bonus also applies to the foremen and is about \$16 monthly for the wood workers (bonus equally shared between them) and \$20 for the paper workers (also equally shared). The welders make their bonuses individually based on the specific pieces the

individual has made and these range from between \$10 and \$60 per month. Bonuses are added to the worker's base salary and are paid monthly.

From the beginning, the Wonder Workshop benefited from word of mouth and many sales were made from the office Workshop by people coming by. The \$4,000 per month in sales that the Wonder Workshop was making at the time of Elly's departure was broken down roughly as follows:

- 25% directly from the Workshop
- 20% to shops outside Dar es Salaam in Zanzibar, Arusha and Moshi
- 15% from twice-yearly craft fairs in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi
- 15% on custom commissions from individuals and organizations⁵
- 10% from shops in Dar es Salaam (such as Wooden Keepsake, Airport, Mawazo Gallery, Cotton Club, Zantaani, Novel Idea, Ethnic Beads),
- 10% from Hotels and Lodges in Dar es Salaam
- 5% from shipping directly to international shops or individuals (in countries such as The Netherlands, Italy, South Africa, US and UK)

Of the Workshop's monthly expenses, approximately 65% went to salaries and benefits, 15% to manufacturing supplies, 10% to office supplies, 10% to other expenses such as transportation, security, and miscellaneous expenses (see financial statement appendix D). Currently, Wonder Welders was not yet financially self-sustaining. Although they were turning over about \$4,000 in an average month, Paul estimated that the Workshop would need a turnover of about \$5,500 to break even. The shortfall was currently being made up from annual donations by the Charity Goat Races (\$1,000-\$2,000), Paul's Family Trust (\$2,000) and other small donations from companies and donors. Typically, donations paid for the training and capital investment required to start up new product lines. Donations also helped to pay for other capital expenses. For example, the Rotary Club in Dublin donated \$1,000 towards the motorized rickshaw and 12 companies in Dar es Salaam each donated \$100 each to pay for their audit.

The Workshop had one vehicle that the able-bodied foremen used to deliver products to the stores in Dar and pick up supplies. They were in the process of securing a smaller three-wheeled motorized rickshaw that could be modified so that it could be driven by the disabled workers as well.

In terms of marketing, the Wonder Workshop had always benefited from word of mouth exposure through the ex-pat community looking for unique and high-quality gifts from Tanzania. They also had a web site and flyers and each product was sold with a tag which gave the Wonder Welders story and contact details. Paul also had an extensive e-mail list that was used to encourage people to support the Workshop with their purchases. In 2008, after a two-year track record of audited financial statements, they applied for membership in the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT). This will allow the Workshop to be listed on their website and will raise their profile with large fair trade purchasers such as 10,000 Villages, Oxfam, and Trade Craft. This exposure should significantly increase the workshop's contacts, sales channels and marketing reach.

Challenges Moving Forward

As the evening wound down and the workers began to leave one by one, Elly began to think about the choices the Wonder Workshop would need to make going forward. As the last workers

made their way home through the compound gate, Elly strolled through the various parts of the workshop thinking back on the three years she had spent there.

She reflected back on the letter that she had written to her future replacement, a VSO volunteer that was coming in next week to take over her job as coordinator. The new volunteer would arrive just after Elly would be leaving (Harry had been transferred back to his home country of Australia and Elly would go with him there) and Elly's flight left the next day. In the letter, Elly had shared all of the opportunities that the workshop coordinator position would be presented with including having amazing high-quality products that were in demand. She also wrote about some of the challenges that would have to be faced. These included:

Financial Sustainability

The Wonder Workshop was able to cover most of its regular operating expenses but still needed infusions of donations to expand operations, launch new product lines or purchase any additional equipment such as welders and woodworking tools. The margins were slim however and the workshop recently raised \$100 each from 12 companies in Dar es Salaam to pay for its financial audit. The new coordinator would need to ensure that the Workshop could become more financially self-sustaining so that it could continue to employ and train its disabled workers and hopefully grow to benefit more disabled people in the future.

Worker Frictions

Inevitably, there were many tensions bubbling under the surface among the employees, many of which had to do with money. Although the Workshop was organized as a coop and all of the profits were going to pay salaries and keep the organization running, there were a number of tensions over perceptions about money. Tanzania was emerging from a long period of socialism, and it was very difficult for many of the workers to understand that the workshop was a cooperative entrepreneurial venture and that no one else was profiting from their work besides themselves.

There was also some dissatisfaction with the fact that many of the workers were paid more or less the same basic salary regardless of their ability or work ethic. The Wonder Workshop had been founded with a mission to help handicapped people live productive lives and to help to see them as valuable contributing members of society and all workers were paid similar salaries (plus the 5% bonus incentives). In a number of instances, those that worked harder resented the fact that people who couldn't or didn't work nearly as much were also paid the same. One of the Welders, Ernest, complained that *"I am tired of having to be here to make money for handicapped people. I want to make money for myself and only myself and what's wrong with that?"* Some of the workers saw the indented equitable design of the salaries as inequitable. The bonus scheme benefited the individual efforts of the welders who were paid per piece, but did not reward the individual efforts of any of the other workers. And it seemed that all of the workers, whether they were hard working or not, was unsatisfied with the level of their salaries (which were equivalent to the Tanzanian minimum wage) and wanted them to be significantly increased.

Order Volume, Timeliness and Quality

Now that they were members of the International Federation of Alternative Trade and were become better known locally, Elly knew that they would soon be getting larger orders from some

of the major Fair Trade organizations like 10,000 villages. This would be an amazing opportunity to increase their turnover. However, these large orders would need to be filled on time and with a high standard of quality. The Workshop was used to working on its own time with few outside scheduling demands.

Question of Scale and Mission

Elly also worried that if the project became too professional and scaled up too much that it would lose its heart and soul and drift away from its social mission.

The Way Forward

With her bags packed, Elly walked home through the workshop gates and her flight the next morning. What would be the next steps for the Wonder Workshop?

Appendix A: Wonder Workshop Employee Profiles



Ernest Nyabalale

Born: 1968, Kigoma kijijini

Family: Parents still living in Kigoma.

Current: Ernest lives in Dar es Salaam, Kinondoni with a younger brother who works as a security guard. He came to Dsm in 1982 to study. He finished secondary school in 1991. Since then he has done various course in computer studies and typing. However he has found it difficult to find work. Ernest currently survives by help from friends and his brother.

Medical: He was born with handicapped legs, the problem is not known.



Michael Fundi

Born: 1982, Dodoma.

Family: Mother lives in Dodoma.

Current: Michael currently lives in Dsm, Ukonga with a friend. He earns between Tsh 20,000 - 25,000 per month by begging on the roadside. He came to Dsm in 1999 to do some business / trading. After building a small stall and endeavouring to sell water and sweets, his stall was demolished by the City Council. This happened more than once. Since then he has had to resort to begging to earn any money. He finished school at Standard Two.

Medical: Michael got polio as a small child, he doesn't remember when.

Other: He says that he would like "to work to improve himself."



Petro 'Bahati' Andrea

Born: 1968, Kigoma kijijini

Family: Bahati has three children and a wife living in Kigamboni.

Current: He says his wife does not work and he is the main bread earner of the family. He earns between Tsh 20,000 and 30,000 per month by begging on the roadside. Bahati came to Dsm 13 years ago from Mwanza, where he had work in a factory, which closed down. There was no work available in Mwanza so he came to Dsm looking for work. He tried a small trading business but was demolished and continually removed by the City Council.

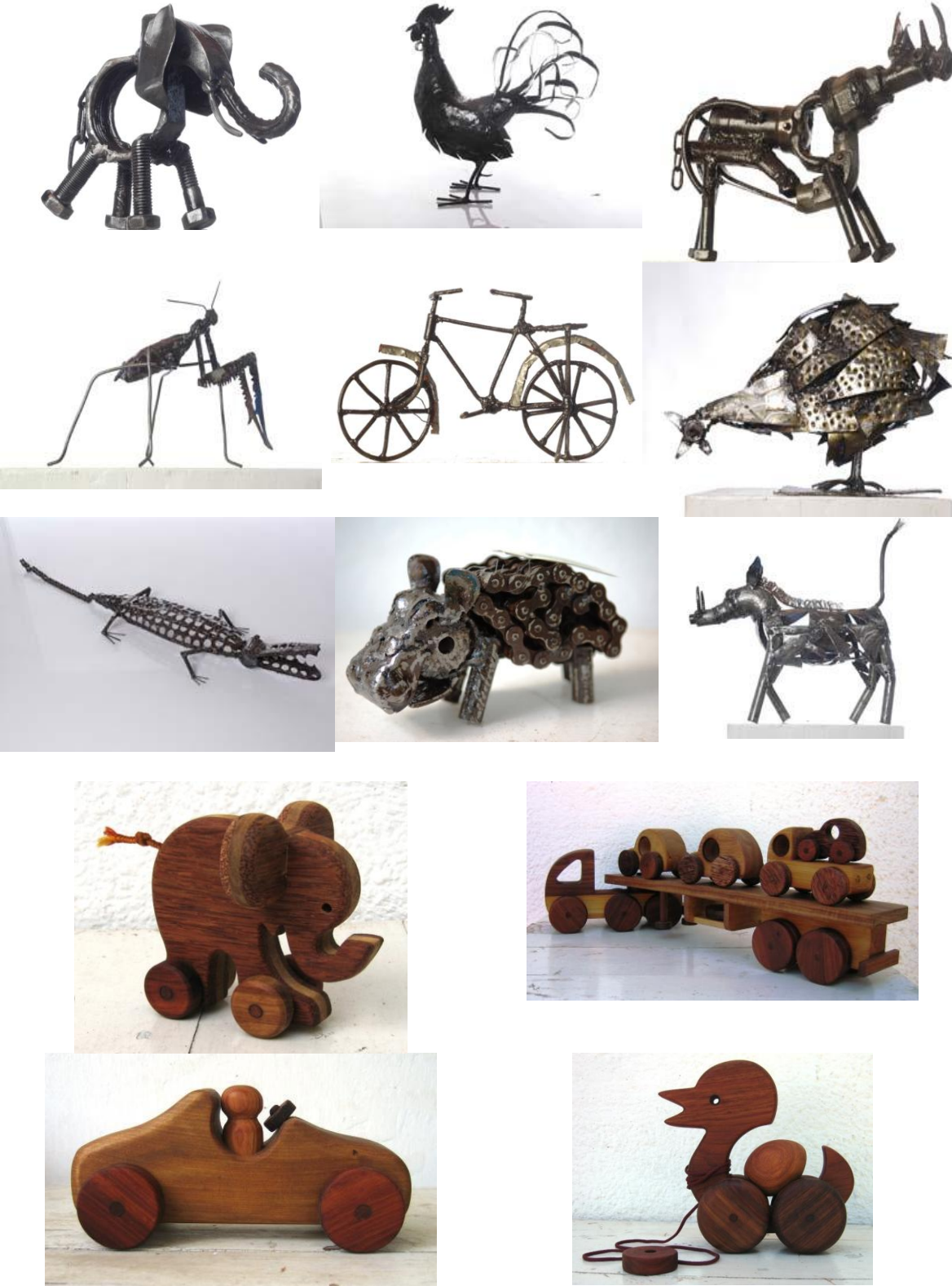
Medical: Bahati went down with polio at 11 years old. Within two weeks, he says, both legs were crippled. The clinic was too far to go to receive treatment. He stayed at home.



Joyce Joseph

Joyce Joseph suffered from Polio when she was 3 years old, since then she has lived with the serious effects of this illness which left her physically disabled and unable to walk. With the aid of a specially designed orthopaedic shoe, crutch and metal brace she can move around however, this equipment is costly and her family was only able to buy her a very basic version which does not allow her to bend her leg. Therefore she spends the majority of her time with her leg in a permanent, uncomfortable position. The new technology costs 375,000/= (about £150) and with it she would be able to walk and sit in comfort and with ease as she could bend her leg.

Appendix B: Pictures of Wonder Workshop Products

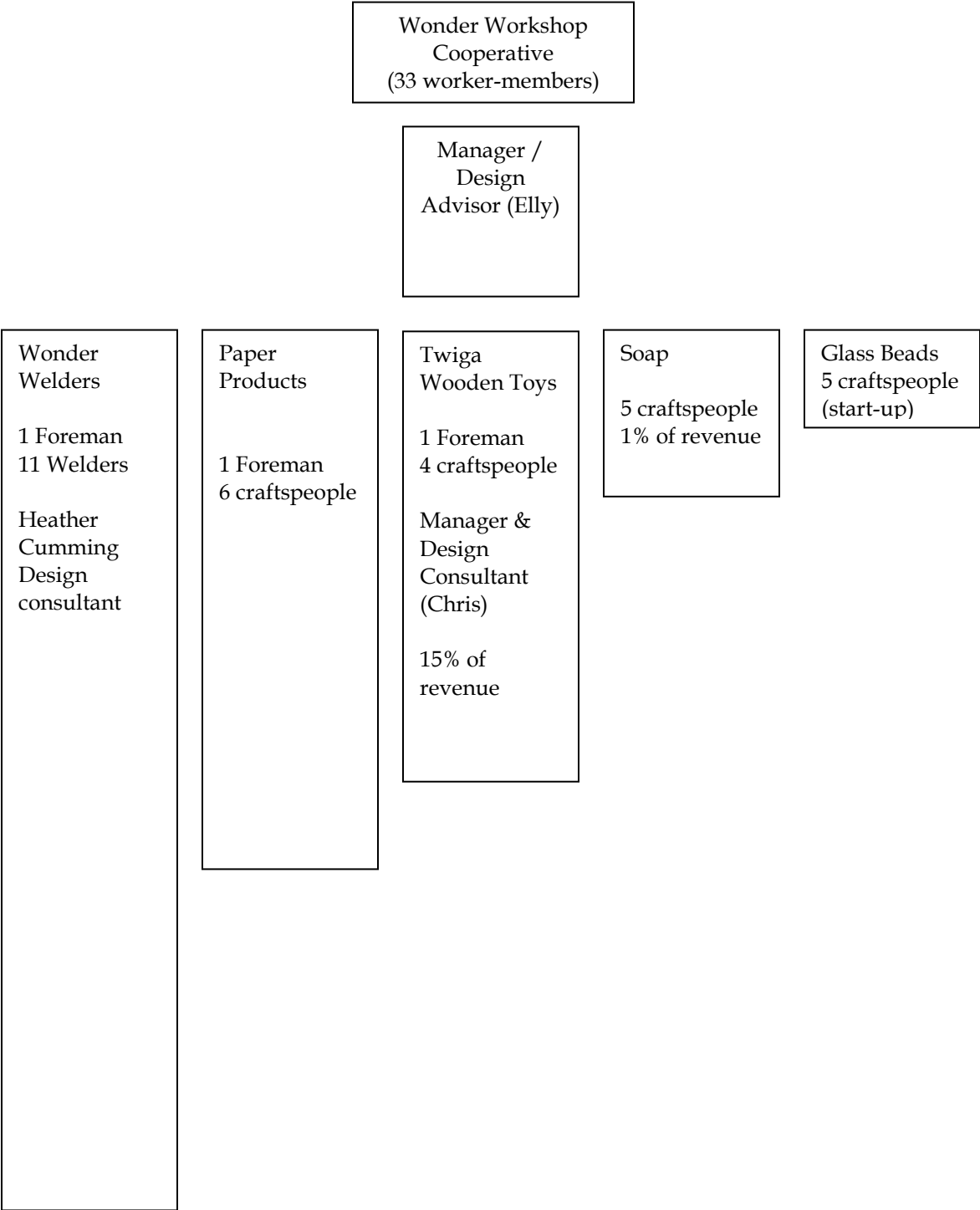




Wonder Workshop Tent at Nairobi Craft Show



Appendix C: Organigram



Appendix D: Financial Statement of Activity

Statement of Activity

REVENUE & SUPPORT	December 04	December 05	December 06
Sales			
Welding			
Paper			
Wood			
Other (soap, candles, glass)	\$ 5,593,014	\$ 2,129,019	\$ 4,566,994
Donations	\$ 242,924	\$ 124,576	\$ 762,758
Goat Races			
Paul's Foundation			
Other			
TOTAL	\$ 6,431,844	\$ 2,913,220	\$ 6,542,252
EXPENSES			
Salaries	\$ 2,574,039	\$ 2,332,266	\$ 3,199,961
Craftspeople			
Foremen			
Manager			
Manufacturing Supplies	\$ 513,011	\$ 743,671	\$ 746,994
Office Expenses	\$ 259,240	\$ 285,544	\$ 398,616
Transportation			
Rent			
Utilities			
Lunches			
Marketing and Communications			
Rent			
Other	\$ 40,000	\$ 685,104	\$ (10,271)
TOTAL	\$ 3,386,290	\$ 4,046,585	\$ 4,335,300
INCREASE IN			
NET ASSETS	\$ 3,045,554	\$ (1,133,365)	\$ 2,206,952

Appendix E: Wonder Workshop Timeline and Milestones

March 2004	Paul gets the idea for Wonder Welders, driving by disabled beggars at the corner in Dar es Salaam
31 st March 2004	Paul writes first Wonder Welders Proposal
	Charity goat races donation establishes Wonder Welders and 3 disabled men are taught to weld
December 2004	8 people trained in welding and working at the workshop
Jan & Feb 2005	Heather Cumming trains welders in new designs in scrap metal.
February 2005	Elly comes on board, having arrived in Tz in late January
March 11, 2005	First Exhibition of new designs. Money raised helps further expand the workshop and train more disabled welders.
May 1, 2005	Workshop moves from Paul's backyard to present home
August 2005	Wonder Workshop officially registered as a Tanzanian NGO
October 2005 (or is it Jan 2006?)	Wonder Workshop expands beyond welding as recycled paper-making is introduced with training from Eleanor Smith and funding from the Charity Goat Races and training from Eleanor Smith.
April 2006	Carpentry workshop set-up by Christopher Weinberger, a volunteer from the US, trained 5 disabled men how to make handmade wooden toys from renewable Tanzanian wood sources.
July 2, 2006	First Exhibition of launch of wooden toys at Tanz Hands
	A soap-making section was started where handmade soaps are made from local oils and spices.
November 2006	Makutano sales (Arusha - \$2,500)
December 2006	Nairobi Craft Sale(\$1,400)
Jan 12, 2007	Sale at Belgium Embassy (\$300)
Feb 2007	Glass making coming on line as four workers are trained.
May 2008	Registered member of the International Federation of Alternative Trade
Jan 2008	Elly's going away party

Endnotes

¹ Paul specialized in African wildlife photography and published books on Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia and freelanced for many hotels, camps lodges and other corporate clients. See www.pauljhicks.com.

² See <http://www.tigersclub.org/> and <http://www.goatrases.com/>.

³ Further background on Heather Cumming and her work can be found at www.ironfairy.co.uk/about.htm.

⁴ The Ghanaian beadmakers' work in Tanzania was organized by Alex Wilson, the editor of *The Bead is Constant*, Published by Ghana Universities Press, 2003, on the history and culture of beads in Ghana.

⁵ For example: custom wedding invitations on their paper, welded trophies for sporting events, bookshelves for the British High Commission and small gifts in the shape of miners hats for a large Gold mining company.