

Sir Peter: This is my biggest challenge yet

NORTH East law firm Square One Law is delighted to be working with one of the region's leading businessmen, Sir Peter Vardy, as he launches one of his most ambitious projects to date – a drive to help rebuild Britain's broken communities.

Sir Peter is renowned for building the car dealership group, Reg Vardy plc, into a £2bn national business, employing 6,000 people. In 2006 he sold the business for £506m.

Now he is planning to launch The Jigsaw Foundation which aims to help thousands of the country's most dis-

SQUARE ONE LAW

Sir Peter Vardy has embarked on a mission to help mend Britain's broken communities, and is being supported by Square One Law. He explains what he's hoping to achieve

advantaged people.

"I built and developed a great company and left a fantastic team running it," said Sir Peter. "I sold at the right time and I am now very fortunate that I can use my wealth and experience to put something back into the region.

"There are some tremendous organisations in the region working on a range of social issues and I want to help some of them to scale up their effectiveness."

Sir Peter is always looking for "What Good Looks Like" and has travelled extensively to look at a variety of projects which help those that are home-

less, people with alcohol and drug issues and issues surrounding the re-settlement of those leaving our prisons. Lessons learned will now be used as the template for his new mission.

In San Francisco he visited The Delancey Street Foundation, which offers a home, work and a sense of community to people who have hit rock bottom.

He said: "It was started 40 years ago as a small hostel and now is a huge, 400-strong, self-help and social action project renowned throughout the world, with a restaurant for 150 people, a haulage fleet of 70 vehicles and several other operating companies."

In 1985 a similar foundation was started in Madrid, Spain, called Betel International. It now operates in 22 countries through more than 85 centres and houses over 2300 people.

Sir Peter said: "I was very impressed by the concept and approached Betel about working with The Vardy Foundation to set up residences in the North East.

"Betel is a Christian organisation dedicated to steering the homeless and the long-term unemployed, many of whom have been in and out of prison, towards healthy, independent lifestyles.

"These people need three things; a home, a community to belong to and meaningful work. "We opened our first home in the North East near Hexham last September. It currently houses 29 people. We run a gardening services company, a furniture refurbishment business and will soon open our first charity shop in Benwell.

"One man's story really touched me – he saw his daughter die at the age of two and turned to drink and drugs. He lost his family and lived rough on the streets of Plymouth for 20 years until he discovered Betel.

"It turned his life around and he is now one of the leaders at Hexham who with four others helps run the centre and mentor residents."

Sir Peter continued: "It costs £45,000 a year to put people in prison, so I would like to establish more homes in the region to rehabilitate offenders and help them turn their lives around, without any financial cost to the state.

"We have to look at the reasons why there are so many young offenders who end up on the streets, and ultimately prison. The statistics show that a large percentage of these people have come through the care system.

"Some children have been in up to 40 different foster homes by the time they are 16, and come from terrible family situations, so what chance have they got?"

"The breakdown in families is un-

SQUARE ONE LAW CELEBRATES A FIRST YEAR OF RAPID GROWTH

SQUARE One Law has marked its first anniversary with a celebratory party at its Jesmond offices.

From a standing start last May, the fast-growing Jesmond firm's three founders – Ian Gilthorpe, Alan Fletcher and Robin Winskell – have attracted five high-profile peer partners.

Jeremy Swift (corporate and commercial); Simon Priestley and Barney Frith (property); Jean Pierre Van Zyl (employment) and Stuart Hamilton (private client) were all on hand to thank their clients and introduce them to the 30-strong team now assembled at Square One Law.

Ian Gilthorpe, senior partner, said: "We have established solid foundations for the firm and are we are ahead of where we expected to be. I believe we have attracted a high quality group of people and a leadership team with the drive, ambition and relevant strengths to take this firm forward and build upon our successful start.

"Trust is at the core of what we are doing. It's important that we become trusted advisers for our clients, but it's also important that we have complete trust in each other."

The entrepreneurial founding partners wanted to provide an alternative model for delivering legal services. Their research revealed that clients want to deal with experienced lawyers who have a real understanding of their business and not be delegated to inexperienced members of a larger team.

They want great service combined with certainty on costs, great value for money and then help to achieve the best practical result for their business.

Ian Gilthorpe, added: "We've designed Square One Law with the needs of business leaders at its core as they look to maximise opportunities for their businesses.



PARTNERS Front from left, Simon Priestley, Alan Fletcher, Barney Frith. Back, from left, JP Van Zyl, Robin Winskell, Jeremy Swift, Ian Gilthorpe, Stuart Hamilton

We invest the time to really understand their organisations and build long-term relationships with our clients in order to deliver high service levels and value for money, with cost certainty. It's all about paying for talent not overhead.

"Over the last few years we have witnessed our clients' manufacturing businesses becoming leaner and adapting to the demands of the changing global market. They've reinvented themselves to become more competitive. We realised that if we developed along similar lines and built a firm that was leaner and more agile then we could offer legal services in a completely different way."

Robin Winskell said: "We may be only one year old as a business, but the quality of the partners and senior associates we have attracted means we have people who have a great

depth of knowledge and experience and have worked in this region for a long time."

Alan Fletcher said: "Today's client based technologies mean we can work in a different, more efficient and responsive way. Law firms have a tendency to over engineer solutions so we have created a streamlined operation that will help to keep complicated things simple and we've attacked overhead in a way that is only possible when you are starting afresh."

"This type of model was not previously available. Feedback from clients has been extremely positive and the fact we have been acting for great companies like Able, Atlantic Global plc, Miller, Shepherds Offshore, Tharsus and Vardy Group of Companies, to name but a few, demonstrates we must be doing something right!"



WORKING TOGETHER Ian Gilthorpe of Square One Law and Sir Peter Vardy

doubtedly a significant part of the cause, so I went to Chicago to look at a project called Safe Families for Children. It was started seven years ago when a child psychologist saw the need to be a 'family friend' to people experiencing difficulties. The idea was taken up by the faith communities across the city and now over 800 families offer support and mentoring to families in need.

"This programme supports families going through difficult times from a wide range of problems.

"It means the parents could place the children in a safe environment in times of need so the children do not have to go into care. The families are also supported to help them overcome

their difficulties and then are reunited as soon as possible and mentored for years to come."

Chicago now has an army of volunteer families who help thousands of other families. This active involvement is reputed to have saved Chicago social services US\$28m (£18m) last year and only 4% of the children ended up in care. The model has been so successful that it has been rolled out to 14 other states in the USA.

Sir Peter added: "What the Safe Families project has shown me is that if we want to help mend our broken communities we need to do it through early intervention.

"We need to engage with volunteers and I believe there is an army of people

connected to all the different faiths who could play an important role in our communities."

Sir Peter's interest in building cohesive communities dates back over two decades.

He explained: "One of my employees at Reg Vardy had been a foster carer and she said one of the main problems was that when they left her they had nowhere to go, and many drifted into petty crime, drink and drugs.

"A significant number of people in our prisons are ex-foster children. They tell me they can manage their sentence, but they cannot handle being back in the outside world.

"It clearly would help the whole community if the reoffending cycle

could be broken."

Sir Peter is currently working with Middlesbrough Mayor Ray Mallon on integrating these types of projects into the town's support programmes.

Another organisation that Sir Peter has looked at is Reflex, which works with 3,000 young offenders every year helping them to break the cycle of reoffending.

It establishes projects that give young people new skills: one prison runs a restaurant so inmates learn how to be chefs, waiters, and kitchen staff.

Others, like Frankland prison in Durham, make furniture so when the inmates leave they have improved their chances of getting a job.

Sir Peter continued: "There are a

whole range of excellent social action projects and we need to piece them together like a jigsaw to help them become more effective.

"I have decided to set up a new charity, called The Jigsaw Foundation to help with these types of projects."

Senior partner of Square One Law, Ian Gilthorpe said: "Sir Peter told me about the Betel project and his vision for setting up a new foundation and my partners and I were very keen that Square One Law should get involved."

Sir Peter is appreciative of the professionalism and skill provided by Square One Law. He said: "It's great to see a new type of law firm on the block. We need new entrepreneurs in the North East.

"Square One has been very supportive of our foundation work and what we are seeking to do and they helped by doing some of the initial work on a pro bono basis.

"Square One Law has a great team of experienced people who are extremely supportive. I rely on them on the legal side, but they have gone much further, taking a keen interest in all of our projects and really understanding what we are trying to do.

"I am always supportive of people who set up new businesses and I find Square One Law's approach refreshing. I have received a highly professional service at an affordable price and would strongly recommend them."