

# **Engaging unemployed women in ESF-funded training**

**Research carried out by the National Institute of Adult  
Continuing Education for the Skills Funding Agency,  
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Of interest to providers delivering to people with out work



**European Union**  
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## **Project Team**

Eta de Cicco, Rachel Spacey, Jane Ward, Jane Watts, Emily Jones, Fiona Aldridge, Sue Parkins, Steve Hartshorn.

Case study researchers: Sue Meyer, Rachel Spacey, Lesley Harry, Jan Eldred, Helen Plant, Pat Whaley.

## Introduction

This is the report of the *Engaging unemployed women in ESF-funded training* research that the Skills Funding Agency commissioned the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to undertake.

## Background

In July 2010, a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) report<sup>1</sup> found that rates for engaging women were particularly low in Priority 1 in comparison to the targets set (35 per cent against a target of 51 per cent). This report also noted some regional variation in the participation of women, and the findings suggested that raising awareness of barriers to women entering employment and training and strategies to support them would help achieve gender participation targets. Recommendations to redress this included better sharing of practice on ways to meet gender equality and equal opportunities targets. The aim of the project is to build on the DWP research by identifying, catalysing and disseminating a core of good practice in successfully engaging unemployed women in ESF programmes.

The objectives are to:

- identify, collate and critically examine ESF provider strategies that have proven to be successful in engaging with unemployed women;
- identify the transferable aspects of these successful strategies that could be adopted by other providers;
- produce high quality case study examples of successful strategies, for dissemination across the sector;

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<sup>1</sup> McNaughton Nicholls, C., Mitchell, M., Brown, A, Rahim, N., Drever, E., & C. Lloyd, 2010. *Evaluation of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities within the European Social Fund*. Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report No 667. London: DWP. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep667.pdf>

- catalyse partnerships between providers and voluntary and community organisations, to engage under-represented client groups;
- facilitate the dissemination of good practice through networks of ESF providers;
- consider the impact of multiple equality characteristics, for example how the needs of unemployed women differ by social class, ethnicity, caring responsibilities, age, disability (including mental health and learning difficulties), sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

This has been achieved through:

- a review of the relevant literature focussing on publications since 2005;
- an online survey of ESF providers in England;
- dissemination of the work through regional provider consultation events and engagement with Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) networks;
- the development of 10 case studies of good practice.

The following report presents barriers and successful strategies identified from the evidence review, questionnaire data, case studies and data gathered from the consultation events. These are illustrated with case studies. The evidence review, questionnaire data and a detailed description of the methods are to be found in the Appendices.

Awareness of many of the barriers to entering training and employment that women encounter, and of the strategies to address them set out in this report, has developed over many years. In more recent times, participation has widened further to include more women facing multiple challenges in their lives, but the barriers they face and successful strategies to address them are not as well documented. This report identifies effective strategies for supporting these women to access and succeed in learning.

As the low numbers of women recruited to ESF pre-employment training indicates, there is a need to constantly reiterate and refresh our knowledge of what works. This will ensure that all those involved, especially new organisations and individuals entering the training field, acquire the knowledge and understanding they need to attract and support women to achieve through their provision.

The issues presented in this report may, of course, also affect men. The important factor to emerge is that responses must be responsive and appropriate. This means that they often need to be differentiated for women. However, the best practice of researching interest and needs, then developing customised responses is best practice for both women and men.

## **Methods**

A mixed method approach was adopted, consisting of an evidence review, a survey, case studies and consultation events with providers. This enabled us to investigate the research questions with a range of providers working with diverse women and to triangulate the findings. Further information about the methods used can be found in Appendix 3.

## **Evidence review**

The desk research aimed to identify barriers and examples of successful responses and strategies for engaging unemployed and economically inactive women. The literature reviewed primarily dated from 2005 and the output was used to design the questionnaire and case study frameworks, and to devise criteria for identifying successful practice. This review of the evidence:

- set the context by exploring research into women's employment patterns, job seeking strategies, attitudes towards employment and training, obstacles to participation and successful strategies to address them and engage unemployed women in training, and;

- reviewed *the Evaluation of Equal Opportunity and Gender Inequality in the ESF* report and other relevant documents to identify specific barriers to participation and strategies of programmes that have resolved these to engage women and facilitate positive outcomes.

These findings were used to inform the design of the questionnaire and case study frameworks set out in stages two and three and to devise criteria for identifying successful practice.

### **Online survey**

All 637 ESF 2007-13 project providers in Priorities 1 and 4 were invited to complete a questionnaire hosted online until Friday 11 March 2011. A total of 121 complete questionnaires were submitted; a response rate of 19.2 per cent. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix 4.

### **Case studies**

Ten case studies of good practice were produced. The case studies were selected to represent work with diverse groups, including women experiencing multiple disadvantages, and a regional spread to ensure that geographical differences were taken into account. They included programmes working with both mixed and women only cohorts.

Each case study has drawn upon documentary data as well as primary data. This was collected through interviews with strategic and operational staff and employers where appropriate, at each site. A focus group and/or interviews with women were also conducted at each site. The following case studies are detailed in the Results section:

1. South East - Surrey Care Trust: Family and Community Education
2. South West - Weymouth College: Personal Best Programme
3. East Midlands - Nottingham Women's Centre: Skills for Jobs

4. North East - Durham County Council Adult Learning ESF ESOL Project
5. West Midlands - Birmingham Rathbone: ACCLR8
6. East of England – TCHC: Skills for Jobs
7. Yorkshire and Humber - Kirklees Skills for Jobs
8. North West - The Women's Organisation: Be Enterprising
9. London - StreetVibes: SO2
10. Cornwall – Cornwall Development Company – Gwellheans: Bal Maidens.

### **Consultation and engagement events**

Consultation and engagement events were organised with national and regional, adult and community learning and voluntary sector networks. These aimed to provide networking opportunities, disseminate information about the project, and elicit research data which was included in the analysis. Three events took place for participants including the NIACE's Women's Day Celebration event in London on 7th March. Events were open to all providers, not just those in receipt of ESF funding, in order to learn from, and facilitate links between them.

## **Research findings: barriers and strategies**

### **Introduction**

A review of the pertinent literature conducted to design the case studies, formulate the on line questionnaire and shape the consultation events pointed to a number of barriers affecting women entering learning, pre-employment training and progressing to employment. It also identified strategies to address them (see Appendix 1). There was a high level of consistency and commonality in the review findings in relation to barriers to women's participation in learning and effective strategies for addressing them. These findings were supported and extended by the data from the learning provider questionnaire, interviews with practitioners, focus groups with women learners and consultation event discussions with practitioners. All stressed the importance of adopting approaches designed for the particular circumstances and needs of women learners and potential learners.

The danger in any discussion of barriers to participation is that this tends to produce a negative and deficit view of women and learning. It is important to stress that many women are successful in learning and work and many more have immense potential. Unfortunately is not always realised, for diverse reasons. This section synthesises the findings of all four strands of the research to set out barriers to women achieving their full potential and lessons from programmes that are successfully recruiting women and supporting them to succeed in pre-employment training. It draws out successful approaches to recruiting women then maximising their chances of success, that can be adopted by other projects to strengthen their approaches to recruiting and supporting women in ESF funded training.

### **Barriers to learning and work**

#### **Background circumstances**

One of the most important aspects to recognise, as the evidence clearly illustrates, is that women are not a homogenous group. There are differences in personal histories, circumstances, attitudes, abilities and aspirations within, as well as between groups. In addition to gender, factors affecting participation in learning and

work include age, ethnicity, disability, class and sexuality. Myriad other factors influence participation; including educational history and qualifications, long-term unemployment, work experience, lack of fluency in English, poverty, being a lone parent, gender oppression, domestic violence, sexual abuse, poor mental health, misuse of drugs or alcohol, and involvement in crime or gang membership.

Many women experience a combination of two or more of these factors. This, alongside attitudinal and practical barriers, creates major challenges. These can be experienced in different ways and their impact can be intensified by complex interactions of the different factors. This means that it is imperative that providers do not make assumptions about the interests or support needs of potential women recruits but examine what they really are. Equally, common, fixed strategies are blunt instruments that are less likely to be effective than customised approaches.

### **Attitudinal barriers**

Attitudinal and psychological barriers to learning can be complex and deep rooted in individuals and often their families, peers and communities. Lack of confidence in their ability to learn and succeed, often reinforced by poor self-esteem is almost universally identified as the most significant barrier to women of all ages accessing and progressing in learning and work. Attitudinal barriers, including low confidence, were identified by the largest number of respondents to the learning provider questionnaire as preventing women from engagement with learning, training and employment (Appendix 4: Survey Results). This is because low confidence limits women's belief in their ability to learn and succeed. This low self-worth can lead them to believe that they have little capacity to learn and little or nothing that is of value to employers. This in turn quashes their aspirations or belief they can secure worthwhile employment.

The intensity of confidence and self-esteem levels varies. Low confidence is particularly acute for women who experience multiple disadvantage and life challenges, depression or poor mental health. Women who have never worked or who have been out of the labour market for some time, because of unemployment or bringing up children for example, can also experience low levels of confidence in their ability to re-enter the workforce. Negative experiences of initial education can

lead to low confidence and lack of self-belief in one's ability to achieve through learning, which in turn depresses interest in learning or training:

*"I didn't really do much when I left school; I didn't stick at anything much and had my children very young. I didn't think I could go back to study thinking, 'I can't do that', especially writing skills"* (K, case study 1).

*"Having been a stay at home mum bringing up my children, I felt I had lost the confidence and belief in myself to return to work"* (A, case study 1).

Women's attitudes to learning and work can be shaped, as well as reinforced, by cultural norms, family or peer pressure. Even where their views diverge, this pressure can be difficult to resist. Most adults dislike deviating from majority norms and fear losing face with family and friends. Cultural perceptions about women and work are pervasive and influential. Many women are influenced by, or subscribe to, a traditional view that women's primary role is domestic. They tend to view employment negatively as detracting from time for children and family<sup>2</sup>. For other women, employment has many positive aspects that include income, confidence, a sense of self-worth, well-being, independence, and social benefits and it is often an economic necessity<sup>3</sup>. Although cultural expectations are often identified as a major limitation for Asian women, the research shows that whilst it is true for some, others are keen to work. However, they can be held back by factors such as lack of fluency in written or spoken English language<sup>4</sup> or low expectations.

Employment aspirations and opportunities remain highly gendered and women often think in terms of the '5 Cs' occupations traditionally taken up by women: cleaning,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Tackey, N.D., Casebourne, J., Aston, J., Ritchie, H., Sinclair, A., Tyers, C., Hurstfield, J., Willison, R. & R. Page, 2006. *Barriers to employment for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain*. Research Report No.360. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep360.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Aston, J., Hooker, H., Page, R. & R. Wilson, 2007. *Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's attitudes to work and family*. Research Report No 458. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep458.pdf>; Molloy, D., Knight, T. & K. Woodfield, 2003. *Diversity in disability. Exploring the interactions between disability, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality*. Research Report No 188. London: DWP. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep188.pdf> and Grant, L. & L. Buckner, 2006. *Connecting Women with the Labour Market*. Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets Research Programme Series. Sheffield: Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, (Tackey et al, 2006; DWP, 2007; Booker & Boice, 2007; Ward & Spacey, 2008; Dyke & James; Iliam, 2009; CLES 2009).

catering, caring, cashiering and clerical<sup>5</sup>. These occupations suit some women, but as they tend to be low paid and frequently part-time they can be viewed as not worthwhile where wages do little more than cover costs such as travel or care<sup>6</sup>. The increasing scarcity of sustainable employment because of the recession can also deter women from seeking training. In contrast, for others, training for securing work when the recession recedes can be an attractive prospect.

## Poverty

Poverty can be a substantial barrier to participation. Benefits do not leave much change for investing in learning, and women might lack the money for childcare<sup>7</sup>, transport to reach the programme<sup>8</sup> or materials. Moreover some women are not allowed access to money for personal expenditure or do not prioritise family finances for themselves. This can be the case whether the family is on benefits or members are in work. Some women with multiple barriers are in deep poverty. This is because chaotic lifestyles often mean that they are not getting the benefits they are entitled to and they live in constant fear of benefits being withdrawn, for example the women attending the Bal Maidens women's group in Cornwall (case study 10).

*In rural areas transport links, particularly with bus routes being significantly reduced and also the cost of transport* (Jobs enterprise and training, West Midlands: Questionnaire, section 2: barriers).

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<sup>5</sup> Perrons, D., 2009. *Women and Gender Equity in Employment. Patterns, progress and challenges*. Working Paper 23, Institute for Employment Studies Available at: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/wp23.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Women in the UK are more likely to work in part-time, low paid jobs than men. In 2010, approximately 1.9 million men worked part time compared to 5.7 million women (Unionlearn, 2007. *Women and work*. Unpublished).

<sup>7</sup> The cost and availability of childcare can be an even bigger barrier to lone parents (Ritchie, H., Casebourne, J. & J. Rick, 2005. *Understanding workless people and communities: A literature review*. Research Report No 255. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep255.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> Some women may not have the financial resources to travel from rural areas to jobs (Green, E., Moore, J., Easton, H. & J. Heggie, 2004. *Barriers to Women's Employment and Progression in the Labour Market in the North East of England. Research Report*. Centre for Social and Policy Research, University of Teesside. Available at: <http://www.tees.ac.uk/docs/DocRepo/Social%20Futures%20Institute/Barriers%20to%20Women.pdf>).

*Some of the women attending the Bal Maidens women's group in Cornwall travelled for two hours to get to the groups (case study 10).*

## **Caring responsibilities**

The evidence clearly illustrates that domestic and caring responsibilities remain substantial obstacles to participation<sup>9</sup>. The majority of questionnaire respondents agreed that some women may face one or more barriers to training and employment. These related to ill health, disability, sexuality, age, class, family responsibilities or prior learning and employment experience. Family responsibilities were seen as the greatest barrier, often in conjunction with other variables (Appendix 4). Many women have caring responsibilities that, in addition to children, can include caring for older, sick or disabled family members<sup>10</sup>. This is not a straightforward issue, as differing attitudes, family expectations and ability to afford childcare and domestic help add layers of complexity.

Caring is also related to life stages. Many women make a positive choice to prioritise childcare over employment when they are younger. Women also take on caring responsibilities for aging parents or other family members, often later in their lives. Some have large families or full-time care roles, and feel they cannot afford the time to train or work outside the home, especially if they have little support from spouses or are lone parents. Others would like to train and work but are deterred by the costs such as childcare which can make it seem not worth working. These perceptions are not easily assigned to particular groups of women as the evidence illustrates that even where there are trends, there are clear differences within different groups. Lack of accessible, affordable childcare can be a major deterrent to training and work<sup>11</sup>, as can the timing of programmes that do not accommodate

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<sup>9</sup> Arguably, there is one defining characteristic more than any other which has a detrimental effect on women in the labour market – motherhood. In 2009, the Fawcett Society proposed that motherhood had more of an impact than disability, age or race and has a “*direct and dramatic influence on women's pay and employment prospects*” (Woodroffe 2009, p.3).

<sup>10</sup> Over 70 per cent of women are likely to become carers during their lifetime (Turner, C. & L. Casey, 2007. *Women, Life-long Learning and the Labour Market in the United Kingdom (UK)*. European Association for the Education of Adults). The majority of lone parents (over 90 per cent) are female (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009. *Monitoring the impact of recession on various demographic groups*. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/monitoring-impact-recession-demographic-groups.pdf>).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Li, Y., Devine, F. & A. Heath, 2008. *Equality group inequalities in education, employment and earnings: A research review and analysis of trends over time*. Manchester: Equality

women's need to take children to and from school or the care demands of school holidays: "*Lack of flexibility in the timing of training courses is one of the key barriers women face to entering the labour market and progressing in it*" (Women and Work Commission 2009, p. 23).

### **Access to information**

Lack of awareness about where to access Information, Advice or Guidance (IAG) or about possible training opportunities, what learning involves, and where it takes place can constitute barriers to participation (and were highlighted as key barriers in case study 1). This is especially true where this is endemic across a community so that little knowledge is passed on by word of mouth, or where there is little easily available IAG offered in accessible situations. Where information is available some adults lack the information literacy or language skills to either read it or understand whether, and how, it is relevant to them:

*Lack of information about different types of jobs - they sometimes can't see what could be available* (Private training provider, North East: Questionnaire, section 2: barriers).

### **Location**

The location of training opportunities can hinder access if it requires women to travel any distance. This may demand time they cannot afford, especially if they have to combine training with caring duties. Travel to provision sited beyond walking distance also incurs costs which some women cannot afford.

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and Human Rights Commission 2008. Available at:  
[http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/research/10\\_equality\\_group\\_inequalities\\_in\\_education\\_employment\\_and\\_earnings.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/research/10_equality_group_inequalities_in_education_employment_and_earnings.pdf)

## Skills and capabilities

Lack of qualifications, out of date qualifications or lack of recent or relevant experience can impede access to training and the labour market<sup>12</sup>. They limit the type of work that women can secure to low skilled work. This is usually low paid with poor conditions that can make it unattractive. These factors can lower women's confidence and belief that they can build their skills to improve employment prospects and this in turn inhibits some women from taking up training programmes:

*"I did various dead-end jobs and couldn't see a way out of that" (case study 8).*

## English language

Women who lack fluency in written or spoken English face severe limitations in their employment and training options: *"Fluency in English has been found to increase people's probability of being employed by up to 25 per cent"* (Tackey et al 2006, p.2). Limited knowledge about opportunities for training and employment and/or routes to accessing them is also compounded for women with little English. Kamyabi, the partnership organisation working with Nottingham Women's Centre (case study 3), identified lack of English language as a barrier for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, mainly Pakistani, attending provision at their centre. Anila expressed this combination of factors *"shyness means no words coming in our mouth – language is most problem"*.

Women with high level qualifications from other countries can find that lack of fluency in written or spoken English or non-recognition of their qualifications can prevent them securing equivalent employment<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Women with caring responsibilities are more likely to have interrupted employment histories and this interruption can lead to lack of confidence, lack of recent work experience and out dated qualifications. Grant, L. & L. Buckner, 2006. *Connecting Women with the Labour Market*. Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets Research Programme Series. Sheffield: Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>13</sup> McNaughton Nicholls, C., Mitchell, M., Brown, A, Rahim, N., Drever, E., & C. Lloyd, 2010. *Evaluation of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities within the European Social Fund*. Department

## Accessible employment

Opportunities to access employment also influence aspirations and commitment to training. The indications are that women are being adversely affected by the recession<sup>14</sup>. Female employment is set to rise still further as cuts in sectors where women predominate, especially the service and public sectors, have a disproportionate impact on women<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, welfare support is being cut with changes to lone parent requirements to work, the freeze on child benefit, caps on housing benefit and benefits and tax credits reduced. This is pushing some women into the labour market to secure the family income. This adds up to more women searching for opportunities in the labour market when the overall number of jobs available has reduced. This can be dispiriting and demotivating for women. It is particularly hard for women with additional barriers to securing employment such as low qualifications, lack of work experience, caring commitments or histories of offending or drug or alcohol misuse. There are indications that the recession is changing perceptions of work in different ways. Some women, including young women who have never worked, feel it is unattainable<sup>16</sup> whilst others are becoming very keen to access work to contribute to family finances<sup>17</sup>.

Women juggling home and work or training commitments can be defeated by hours that do not fit with domestic and childcare commitments or requirements to travel long distances. This can be acute in rural areas, where often commuting is neither

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for Work and Pensions. Research Report No 667. London: DWP. Available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep667.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Fawcett, 2010. *Women face Triple Jeopardy of Benefit Cuts, Job losses and Looming 'Care' Gap*: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1195> accessed June 14 2011.

TUC, 2011. *ETUC survey finds cuts hitting women hard across Europe*:

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality/tuc-19583-f0.cfm> accessed June 14 2011.

<sup>15</sup> The number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (the claimant count) increased by 12,400 between March and April 2011 to reach 1.47 million. The number of women claimants increased by 9,300 to reach 474,400, the highest figure since October 1996. National Statistics Online. *Labour Market*. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=12> accessed May 31 2011.

<sup>16</sup> McNaughton Nicholls, C., Mitchell, M., Brown, A, Rahim, N., Drever, E., & C. Lloyd, 2010.

*Evaluation of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities within the European Social Fund*. Department for Work and Pensions. Research Report No 667. London: DWP. Available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep667.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Clark, J., Latter, J., Pereira, I., Leary, K. & T. Mludziski, 2009. *The economic downturn – the concerns and experiences of women and families. Qualitative and quantitative research*. London: Government Equalities Office. Available at: <http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/GEO%20Summary-%20WEB.pdf>

desirable nor possible<sup>18</sup>. Employers are more likely to be flexible to accommodate part-time working, flexible hours and home working where there are labour market shortages.

## Discrimination

The evidence also indicated that some women perceive they are discriminated against on the basis of one or more factors. These include their gender, ethnicity, religion / belief, disability, sexuality, trans status or age<sup>19</sup>. Dale et al (2008), for example, found that some women believed that wearing a headscarf posed a barrier to getting a job whilst a study of second generation British Muslim women found that some who wore the hijab at work “*highlighted that, while they could not be certain, they felt that they had missed out on progression opportunities because of religious discrimination and that the wearing of the hijab could have been a factor*” (Bunglawala 2008, p.6).

Although difficult to prove, discrimination is a significant factor as its consequences include unjust restriction of opportunities. It can also function as a deterrent to aspiration and this can affect perceptions of the value of training.

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<sup>18</sup> Grant, L. & L. Buckner, 2006. *Connecting Women with the Labour Market*. Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets Research Programme Series. Sheffield: Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Bunglawala, Z., 2008. *Valuing Family, Valuing Work: British Muslim Women and the Labour Market*. The Young Foundation and the London Development Agency. Available at: [http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/Final\\_Valuing\\_Family\\_Valuing\\_Work\\_Oct\\_08\\_0.pdf](http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/Final_Valuing_Family_Valuing_Work_Oct_08_0.pdf)

Dale, A., Dex, S., Lindley, J., Ahmed, S., Wathan, J. & A. Rafferty, 2008. *Ethnic differences in patterns of employment and unemployment: gender and generation: full report*. Available at: <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/research/documents/report.pdf>

Tackey, N.D., Casebourne, J., Aston, J., Ritchie, H., Sinclair, A., Tyers, C., Hurstfield, J., Willison, R. & R. Page, 2006. *Barriers to employment for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain*. Research Report No.360. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep360.pdf>

Molloy, D., Knight, T. & K. Woodfield, 2003. *Diversity in disability. Exploring the interactions between disability, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality*. Research Report No 188. London: DWP. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep188.pdf>

Rolfe, H., Dhudwar, A., George, A. & H. Metcalf, 2009. *Perceptions of discrimination in employment*. London: Government Equalities Office. Available at: [http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/296676\\_GEO\\_PerceptionsDiscrimination\\_acc.pdf](http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/296676_GEO_PerceptionsDiscrimination_acc.pdf)

*Women, especially Lesbian women, wanting to train in male orientated professions such as construction or plumbing etc., often feel 'intimidated' by the male bias of training options (Learning partnership, London: Questionnaire, section 2: barriers).*

### **Multiple disadvantages**

Women experiencing multiple disadvantages tend to have complex problems which combine to intensify the barriers set out above. Their personal histories and experiences can result in extremely low levels of confidence and self-esteem in relation to learning and employment. They are more likely to be living in domestic situations that impede their ability to take part in learning, and severe poverty is also limiting. In addition, chaotic lifestyles and complicated patterns of multi-agency involvement can restrict their availability. For example, women attending the Bal Maidens group in Cornwall experienced a range of difficulties which included physical and mental health problems, relapses into substance abuse and chaotic lifestyles. Some of the women had backgrounds where abuse and neglect were endemic and intergenerational, and were often unable to live with their children or, in some cases, to see them. All were well supported by the customised provision offered by Gwellheans (case study 10).

### **Strategies to recruit women and support them to succeed and progress**

The evidence clearly indicates that to recruit and support women learners, providers must consider the circumstances and needs of the women they wish to recruit. Women furthest from learning, pre-employment training and work often experience multiple barriers which interact in complex ways. This poses considerable challenges to accessing, sustaining and progressing in learning and work. It is crucial, therefore, that providers do not make assumptions about the circumstances or needs of potential women participants. They should actively identify the interests and barriers facing the women they aim to recruit then adopt appropriate strategies to address them. This section sets out proven strategies for engaging women in learning and training and supporting them to access provision, designing provision, support and progression.

## Engagement and recruitment

There is no one way to reach women, However, research shows that strategies designed to reach out to potential learners where they live, work and/or socialise, prove most effective. In other words, going out to women, works better than expecting them to come to you<sup>20</sup>. This might be, for example, meeting women at school gates or when attending surgeries, support or interest groups. The key to successful engagement of women is to carry out research to establish the needs, interests and situations of potential recruits as well as possible barriers to their participation. Some projects are set up to work with defined groups, for example, adults who are rebuilding their lives after a crisis or have low educational achievement. Others have a geographical catchment. Whichever is the case it is important that staff identify which groups the programme aims to reach, including new and different learners. They should then research their needs, interests and potential circumstances rather than making assumptions about them. Where the catchment is mixed, it is important to recognise that the strategies required to recruit and support women might differ from those effective for recruiting men.

*The Trust targets those women who under-achieved in their initial education experiences and/or who feel limited by their life situations. This involves taking provision to particular, identified communities and reaching out to new and different learners (case study 1).*

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Gray, R., 2008. *Steps to Success project report*. Leicester: NIACE; Ward, J. & R. Spacey. 2008. *Dare to Dream: learning journeys of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women*. Leicester: NIACE; Tackey, N.D., Casebourne, J., Aston, J., Ritchie, H., Sinclair, A., Tyers, C., Hurstfield, J., Willison, R. & R. Page, 2006. *Barriers to employment for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain*. Research Report No.360. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep360.pdf>; Bunglawala, Z., 2008. *Valuing Family, Valuing Work: British Muslim Women and the Labour Market*. The Young Foundation and the London Development Agency. Available at: [http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/Final\\_Valuing\\_Family\\_Valuing\\_Work\\_Oct\\_08\\_0.pdf](http://www.youngfoundation.org/files/images/Final_Valuing_Family_Valuing_Work_Oct_08_0.pdf); Dyke, A. H. & L. James, 2009. *Immigrant, Muslim, Female: Triple Paralysis?* London: Quilliam. Available at: [http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/stories/pdfs/quilliam\\_immigrantmuslimfemale\\_triple\\_paralysiss\\_july\\_2009.pdf](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/stories/pdfs/quilliam_immigrantmuslimfemale_triple_paralysiss_july_2009.pdf).

*When The Women's Organisation (TheWO) in Liverpool begin working in a new area, they carry out research in the community to identify what women's training needs are, and what specific approaches will best enable them to participate. These ideas are then taken back to the central team who refine the generic course so that it reflects what will engage women in that particular context (case study 8).*

## **Word of mouth**

A consistent message across all case studies and questionnaire responses is that word of mouth is one of the most effective approaches to recruiting women. This is because many do not know about, or use, established referral agencies. Most women respond best to personal contact, especially when they lack self-confidence and /or knowledge of what is on offer and whether and how they can access it.

*In our experience a positive reputation and 'word of mouth' advertising for a course is by far the most effective means of communicating the message (Charity, South East England: Questionnaire, recruitment).*

People who live or work in communities are usually best placed to inform and encourage local women to take up learning and training. Frontline workers such as librarians, health visitors, youth workers, community workers, school and Children's Centre staff have the contacts, insights and capacity to inform and encourage the women they work with to engage with training.

Publicising success and establishing trust with local people will encourage programme graduates and others to spread the word to family and friends. To do this, projects will need to build relationships with local agencies and groups and work with existing local area networks.

Building relationships with staff in referral agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, including exchange visits, can be extremely valuable. It can build mutual understanding so that projects can maintain on-going relationships and information flow. This can enhance the ability of staff to identify and signpost women who might benefit from training programmes. Specialist agencies or organisations working with particular

groups, for instance black and minority ethnic adults with disabilities, are able to assist in recruiting women who might not otherwise reach provision.

*Joanne had been in full time employment, a county athlete who ran a local football team whilst bringing up four children until a major car crash in 2002 brought her life to a halt. She had not worked since then and experienced long periods of being housebound with depression and health difficulties. Joanne's disability adviser suggested the Personal Best programme to her and made the initial contact with the administrator: "I didn't have time to stop and think and have second thoughts, S (the course administrator) was on the phone to me within 40 minutes and then met me at reception when I went for an interview and even took me to my first class". Joanne has now successfully completed the programme and applied to become an Olympic Games maker - Personal Best programme at Weymouth College (case study 2).*

## **Outreach work**

Outreach work is a well-established method for reaching and engaging people. It involves the use of volunteer or paid outreach workers to go out into communities to communicate with people where they are. This will be in places such as schools, clinics, Children's Centres, public libraries, doctors' surgeries, community centres and youth projects. Recent work<sup>21</sup> has demonstrated the power of community learning champions, who are also known by other names such as learning advocates or barefoot workers. They encourage and support their peers to take up learning and, where appropriate, support them through the process. They are effective because they are 'someone like them' to the learner or potential learners/trainees which makes them more likely trust what they are being told. Trusted individuals can also assist in addressing the suspicion and resistance of family members. Some champions can communicate in other languages to reach women who are not yet fluent in English.

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<sup>21</sup> NIACE, 2011. *Community Learning Champions. Report on the National Community Learning Champions Support Programme 2009-2011*. Leicester: NIACE. Available at: <http://www.communitylearningchampions.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/CLC-Final-report-FINAL-2.pdf> accessed 31 May 2011.

## **Informal activity**

The case studies demonstrate that informal activity such as coffee mornings or informal taster sessions is effective. It offers safe opportunities for women to find out about programmes, discuss their interests and concerns and meet staff before they commit to a programme. These activities can also offer advice on finances and practicalities such as childcare. Where appropriate these sessions can have an interpreter present or take place in community languages to facilitate access for women who are not yet fluent in English. This can be complemented by 1-to-1 support for women to progress from this initial contact to accessing pre-employment provision, for instance, by accompanying women who are nervous in new situations to the first session.

*TheWO's staff engaged with women in local settings as well as holding stalls at local job fairs, road shows and events. In some cases, activities for children were run to attract women with their families and keep the children occupied while the outreach worker spoke to the mothers. The project outreach worker stressed the importance of engaging with them in ways that are comfortable to them: "Sometimes that means you have to get down on your hands and knees on the mat where they're playing with their children to talk to them, because it's not good saying, 'come and sit over here,' when they're in the middle of playing with their children" (case study 8).*

## **Advertising**

Some women respond to flyers and newspaper adverts. It is important to recognise that these methods are not usually as effective for those furthest from learning and training or who do not have strong use of literacy skills. They can, however, inform people working in the area who are in a position to use the information to signpost women they have contact with.

Some projects have found local or community radio effective.

*In Durham, a lot of engagement was via schools and basic fliers were circulated in school bags with other information for parents (case study 4).*

*TCHC had a major success with a large advertisement in a local paper's educational supplement (case study 6).*

## **Social media**

Use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and web blogs is starting to increase as a means of engagement. At the current time, this is only effectively reaching people who use social media, which in the case of Twitter in particular, is still more likely to be younger women<sup>22</sup>.

*TCHC recruited some women through Twitter and the website 'Mum's the Boss'<sup>23</sup>, which supports women in business (case study 6).*

*TheWO found that free press advertisements and internet attract a steady flow of participants (case study 8).*

## **Training structure and content**

There is no fixed format or content for pre-employment training. However, the research findings indicate that provision is most successful when it is:

- flexible;
- gender aware;
- designed to raise aspirations;
- tailored to respond to the needs of its female recruits (albeit within the constraints of funding requirements where applicable);
- offers appropriate support to address specific needs or concerns;
- rooted in labour market prospects;
- strongly linked with employers.

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<sup>22</sup> The largest group of Twitter users worldwide in the third quarter of 2010, were aged 25-34 (30%) compared with 25% of Facebook users. Interestingly, 24% of Facebook users (the majority of whom are women - 57%) are aged 45-54. [http://socialmediatoday.com/paulkiser/199133/social-media-3q-update-who-uses-facebook-twitter-linkedin-myspace?utm\\_source=Webbiquity](http://socialmediatoday.com/paulkiser/199133/social-media-3q-update-who-uses-facebook-twitter-linkedin-myspace?utm_source=Webbiquity)

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <http://www.mumstheblog.co.uk/> (accessed May 31 2011).

It is important to stress that there is a difference between planned and tailored support and establishing dependency. Pre-employment programmes aim to prepare women for the world of work where the level of support offered on a training course will not usually be available. Programmes that are designed to enable women to succeed by equipping them to secure and sustain themselves in employment are most constructive and productive. This means that support should be planned and offered in ways that lead to independence, for example, by building confidence as well as skills. Support will often be intense at significant points and taper as the learning journey progresses. It is vital to recognise that this can be a lengthy journey for some women, especially those experiencing multiple disadvantages. Even so, fostering independence should always underpin support throughout the programme.

### **Accessible**

The training should be offered close to where women live or on accessible public transport routes to make it easier to reach the training and to spend as little time as possible travelling. This will assist learners to fit in training with their other commitments. One programme, for instance has a 'pram pushing policy' meaning they offer provision within walking distance of the communities they serve. Some projects organise transport to support participants with health difficulties and disabilities or in rural areas to access provision (case study 4).

Opportunities to train remotely or online can enhance access for some women. This includes some disabled women or women who find it difficult to leave home because they live some distance from provision, for example, in rural areas or they have caring responsibilities or are in an abusive relationship. However, this option must be supported to be effective and some providers expressed concerns about inherent barriers in online training. These might be limited access to IT facilities, IT and literacy skills, isolation and losing the benefits of group interaction and support. More realistic options for women experiencing these barriers are approaches that blend face-to-face and supported online learning.

Women-only groups and spaces can make training more attractive and accessible to some women. They may feel more comfortable or safer than they would in a mixed environment, for example, because of religious or cultural reasons or their experiences of violence and abuse<sup>24</sup>. This was illustrated in case studies produced for this research where women felt vulnerable because of problems with drug and/or alcohol addiction (case study 10), or had serious personal issues including experience of domestic violence and other forms of abuse, mental health issues, lack of confidence or were unable to attend training where men were present (case study 3):

*Women only spaces and women only groups are crucial for many women especially at the early stages of their learning or following a 'disruption' in their lives (Women's training and support centre, East of England: Questionnaire: key success factors).*

The questionnaire data revealed that almost one third of respondents (35 of 121) agreed that women preferred employment training in women-only groups. As the following quote from a learning provider reveals, some women might prefer to start in women-only groups and progress to learning in mixed groups when they have built their confidence:

*Our public job search areas are predominantly used by our male customers. Females have commented on feeling uncomfortable and want no communication with the men using the services. Female customers tend to book 1:1 advice sessions or attend group sessions often delivered by a female advisor. This is a generalisation but observations show the more confident, experienced and qualified are more able to access the public service alongside their male counterparts (Local authority learning and employment service, South East England: Questionnaire: key success factors).*

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<sup>24</sup> Ward, J. & R. Spacey. 2008. *Dare to Dream: learning journeys of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women*. Leicester: NIACE; Konitou, M. & N. Toole, 2009. *A Woman's Place*. Leicester: NIACE. Available at: [http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/f/i/file\\_3\\_22.pdf](http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/f/i/file_3_22.pdf)

It is important to consider how women can be supported to progress from women-only groups into mixed working environments. The needs of the majority of women that the questionnaire data indicates are learning in mixed groups should also be considered. It is important to create a respectful environment which offers gender aware, appropriate content, materials, support and advice relevant to their interests, needs and ambitions. Developing and enhancing their confidence is also important.

Provision must be flexible to support access for women with caring responsibilities. The dates and timing of sessions is a consideration where the women attending have domestic or childcare responsibilities. Strategies to consider include timing them to fit with school times or to take place in term time. Flexibility in attendance patterns should also be considered where possible.

Supporting access to childcare provision is a pre-requisite to enable some women to attend, especially mothers of pre-school children or in the school holidays. This support might include offering childcare support for the programme and if possible this should be considered at the set up stage although it is recognised this will not be an option for all provision. Other approaches are to provide details of local childcare provision and information about financial support for childcare, as cost can be a major deterrent.

### **Financial support**

Women of all ages cited financial costs as a potential barrier to participating in training and starting in employment. Many women not in work are living in poverty with many calls on their income. Even where a family is better off, women do not always have access to independent income and may be restricted from spending the family income on themselves. The costs of care, travel and course materials can be considerable. In addition, some women will need suitable clothes for attending interviews and volunteering or work experience. Meeting or contributing to these costs can assist women to take part and benefit fully from training opportunities.

## Initial assessment

As with all learning, it is important to carry out high quality initial assessment to support programme design, to identify women's starting points, and to start to build their confidence. This initial assessment is most successful where it is founded on knowledge of the potential barriers that women experience and if offered in ways that start to address them. Gender sensitive initial assessment, for instance can be crucial to overcoming women's lack of confidence and sense of self-worth. It requires a positive approach that focuses on recognising what skills women have and what they can do (rather than what they can't) as a basis for future development.

At TheWO in Liverpool, the initial assessment process is key in helping women overcome their lack of confidence and sense of self-worth. The adviser works with clients to identify their existing skills, and help them recognise and value what they can do. This may mean, for example, enabling women to recognise the skills that they have gained through raising a family, running a home or helping out in their place of worship

*TheWO advisor works with the client to identify her existing skills and help her to recognise the value of what she can do. "They come to us thinking that they're rubbish and saying, 'I don't know how to do anything.' We say to them, well what have you been doing? Bringing up your children, getting them to school on time? You have some skills around punctuality, timekeeping then"* (case study 8).

It is also vital to ensure that advisors understand the learners' circumstances and involve them in negotiating and planning their learning and that programmes are appropriate for their interests and circumstances. Negotiating goals designed to give success, agreeing an action plan, attendance requirements and communication protocols and splitting learning into small chunks to make it accessible and easy to restart if there are interruptions, are particularly important for women with chaotic lifestyles. Building in access to advice and support for a range of issues is also important, and crucial for women with challenging lives.

*At Nottingham Women's Centre the goals agreed for the women are designed to provide early and continuing success: "it doesn't matter where you start from you don't feel people looking down at you or you can't do it" (L, case study 3).*

*At Birmingham Rathbone staff consider gender imbalance and try to encourage young people not to be stereotypical in their choices (case study 5).*

### **Access routes**

Where programmes aim to recruit women whose experiences and circumstances place them some distance from learning and training and/or employment it is important to consider appropriate access routes. It can be difficult for some women to commit to pre-employment training straightaway. They will benefit from provision such as taster sessions, short courses or staged entry which can boost their confidence and offer a supported route into pre-employment training. These can be offered by the provider or another local partner.

### **Programme length**

Short courses or courses divided into modules can introduce women to learning gradually. This can build their confidence and capacity to learn and prepare them for entry to longer learning programmes requiring more hours of commitment. Small chunks of learning can help retain learners on a programme in the initial stages as they are able to try out, gain recognition for their learning and start to identify where their aptitudes and interests lie. This is confidence building, motivating and aids retention. Options sessions work well, for example for some young people and older people needing to transfer skills as it acknowledges their relevant experience.

*"Doing little courses was helpful for me to see what I was good at and enjoyed as well as those things I didn't enjoy. You get a certificate for all your efforts and that makes you feel good about learning" (M, case study 1).*

## Content

The content of programmes will depend on a number of factors including compliance with funding requirements as well as local need. Content that is gender sensitive, flexible, creative and tailored to the individual needs of the women who attend the programme is most likely to succeed. Other conditions for success are inspirational teachers, appropriate and relevant teaching and learning strategies designed to sustain interest and promote success, and materials relevant to the learners. Accreditation can enhance opportunities and some women will need learning programmes that enable them to get their qualifications from outside the UK recognised.

The content might focus on specific or generic vocational skills depending on the purpose and aims of the programme. Relating these to the local labour market has been suggested as assisting women's employment opportunities. This is particularly true in a recession when it is vital that programmes are aware of local opportunities and the occupations in which recruits are more likely to secure employment. At the same time it should be recognised that relating information and skills to a restricted number of traditional gender related occupations can close down opportunities. In contrast, introducing content relevant to a wide range of occupations, including those not widely taken up by women, can open up new horizons. This can be problematic if these opportunities are not available locally, although this could change in the future. An effective approach therefore, is to raise aspirations and broaden horizons, but within a framework that recognises the current realities of the local labour market.

The potential of self-employment can be highlighted as an option. For women who have the capacity to generate business it can provide independence and the flexibility to work hours and in locations to fit their own circumstances. It can raise aspirations and can also offer opportunities for women to realise long-held dreams of earning income from their skills. It can also be a solution for those who are restricted from joining mixed work forces or to overcome disadvantage in the labour market. There are tried and tested ways of working with people a long way from the labour market. For example, TheWO in the North West supports women into self-employment, offering support from a personal tutor/business advisor as long as the

women need it (case study 8). However, securing resources to support them to set up sustainable businesses from the outset is challenging (partnerships with organisations such as The Prince's Trust are useful). Self-employment is best presented in ways that enable women to think and act creatively and positively within a context of realism about requirements for success. These include assessing the potential market, capital requirements, business planning, marketing and personal drive and capabilities.

Employability and job search skills such as completing application forms, CV writing, and interview technique materials should take account of the ways in which women might present the skills they have gained outside a work environment. This is critical for women with no recent employment history.

Content that familiarises women with modern work place cultures and expectations and their rights at work can be a valuable means of building their confidence, motivation and aspirations and enhancing their employment prospects. This is particularly important for women who have never worked, have been out of the workplace for a long time or have gained their work experience in other cultures, where norms and expectations might be significantly different.

As confidence has been identified as a significant barrier to accessing and progressing in learning and work it is important that both methodologies and content are designed to build confidence. This in turn can heighten ambition and the conviction of women learners that they can succeed in training and when they progress to work. There are many different approaches. Small group sizes, especially in the initial stages or for vulnerable women allow for more personal attention. They make participating and speaking in the group more accessible, thus building confidence. Developing communication skills has a dual purpose of building confidence to speak out whilst developing skills for the workplace.

Smaller venues may be more approachable. One learner felt so afraid of joining the group that she took her mother along with her. She believed that would not have been possible in a large college but the supportive, flexible environment at Surrey Care Trust enabled her to then move on to greater independence (case study 1).

Using women role models from different backgrounds is a positive and creative way of illustrating what women like them can achieve. It can be highly motivating, stimulating women to aspire and to overcome concerns such as whether and how they can balance domestic commitments with employment. It can assist them to realise they can change their lives, take charge of decisions, and that learning can support them to do this.

*The facilitators are often 'home-grown'; many come from the area, were drawn into learning by the Trust and over many years have developed their skills, knowledge and qualifications to help others in similar situations to themselves: "I was a young mum, and ex-offender, used drugs and had mental health issues; I overcame these barriers. Other women can't tell me, 'You don't understand'" (Development worker, teacher and former Surrey Care Trust learner, case study 1).*

## **Work experience**

Work experience or volunteering can take place in the public or private sector or civil society organisations, and is particularly effective when offered in occupations where there are real employment prospects. Supported work placements have been identified as a very significant success factor. They can build women's confidence, motivation and skills for work. They can also enhance work prospects by providing t recent employment experience and open up routes to self-employment. Detailed preparation for volunteer placements and work experience is vital to maximise the gain from these experiences. Placements where the provider maintains close links with the employer and the trainee are most successful.

Some training providers offer opportunities within their organisations and support trainees through to paid employment with them or externally.

*Surrey Care Trust provides women with opportunities to move on to skills development through working with a Community Interest Company called Holistic Harmony. They offer training in a wide range of alternative therapies as well as services to the public, using the learners and volunteers. Through on-going skills*

*development and accreditation, learners can then begin to use their skills at corporate events, with companies and for the public. Learners can progress to becoming volunteers who continue to practise and develop their skills but who are also supported to look more actively for paid employment opportunities. Volunteers can also begin to learn how to develop their own enterprise activities (case study 1).*

## **Support**

Support is a key to success, especially for women experiencing disadvantage. The more complex and multiple the disadvantages, the more acute the need for appropriate support becomes. Support requirements to enable women to persist and succeed in learning differ; some need very little whilst others require varied and or intensive support. Thus support should be personalised. Successful providers adopted very flexible and creative approaches to support. They often drew down additional funding for much focused support which in turn appeared to lead to more successful employment outcomes.

Support for learning could include literacy, language or numeracy support, developing IT skills and / or study support. One to one support in the classroom is appropriate for some women, either to provide support for learning or to address other complex personal or attitudinal barriers. One-to-one work also enables support to be adapted to diverse specific individual needs, for instance those of disabled participants.

It is common amongst successful providers to ring women before the first session and on an on-going basis, if required, to provide extra reassurance and discuss any anxieties or problems they may have. This helps build confidence. Also immediately following up anyone who misses a class gives a message that they are valued and encourages them to return.

*“In the first week we focus upon teamwork, getting peer support in place and boosting trust. We always make reminder calls before the first class just to reassure waverers that it will be ok. If anyone misses a session they are rung straight away and this gives them the message that we value them” (Tutor, case study 2).*

Mentors and buddies can assist and support women either throughout the programme or at critical stages. They can accompany women to their first session, work placements or interviews or support them in learning sessions or with learning outside the programme sessions. They are often recruited from past students or communities of women learners who have shared experiences and understanding. This helps to build trust and formulate creative solutions to obstacles to learning and progress.

*Kirklees Community Campus strongly rely on learning mentors (all of whom are women) and community workers within their centres to help engage local people who have often had prior contact with their local community centre. Their approach is one of building and drawing upon existing, established relationships. (Case study 7).*

Building a strong group dynamic, and adopting group methods that foster peer support are powerful means of assisting women to stay the course. Building friendships and group solidarity also supports women to persist with learning even when they are finding it challenging, or personal circumstances create difficulties. They learn to support each other and many benefit from the peer support as knowing that others share experiences helps them feel less isolated, gain support and in some cases realise they can achieve and are not to blame for their experiences.

*Bal Maidens develop a strong group ethos to boost attendance and success (case study 10).*

*Weymouth College learners said that finding themselves in a similar situation to others on the programme is reassuring and helps learners build their confidence. "It is scary and you think you are on your own but when you walk through the door you realise that you're not which does so much for your confidence...it burst my bubble coming here and now I'm blooming!" (L, case study 2).*

The evidence indicates that a wide range of support mechanisms are needed to support women experiencing multiple barriers into training then employment. They will differ to respond to individual circumstances. These are varied and could include housing support and advice, counselling services, budgeting, health advice and support, avoiding gang involvement and/or assistance with substance misuse. Support might be provided within a project where available, but will usually be arranged through a multi-agency approach in partnership with local services.

*Birmingham Rathbone housing services are important for young people estranged from their families or homeless (case study 5).*

*Nottingham Women's Centre offers other services which contribute to keeping the women on track. Advice is readily available on managing debt, housing, and avoiding criminal behaviour as well as help relating to drug abuse and domestic violence (case study 3).*

### **Information, advice and guidance (IAG)**

Lack of information and/or the ability to interpret it have been identified as barriers. Access to gender aware IAG is essential at each stage of the learning journey. The amount and level required differs, but it should always be informed by knowledge of the gender dimensions to training and employment and tailored to different circumstances. IAG can take place throughout the learning, embedded into the learning or tutorial programme. Referral to specialist advisors is important at critical junctures.

It is essential that advisors can take into account all the factors relating to women's circumstances. This will encourage them to aspire and progress and ensure the information the learners receive is accurate and does not raise false expectations. Women with an offending history, for instance, will need tailored advice about job search and application, covering matters such as whether any occupations are barred and what and how to disclose. Women holding overseas qualifications with work histories in other countries will need specialist advice on routes back into this work, including matters such as whether they can gain recognition of their qualifications and the process and costs of doing so. Alternatively, they might need

advice on realistic alternatives where factors such as language or lack of recognition of their qualifications precludes them from taking up their previous occupation or profession.

*TCHC Advisers focus on available vacancies with learners as much or more than learner aspirations on the basis that getting a job is easier when employed and the knowledge that for these learners jobs are the critical required outcome. Two examples illustrate this in different ways. The adviser spoke of a woman who had not worked for some time and had considerable childcare issues who had been persuaded to consider a cleaning job and one of the women interviewed spoke of how she had initially thought of doing generic ICT training but had been persuaded that accountancy would give her better opportunities in the labour market (case study 6).*

Poverty and finance are important considerations in advice. This might mean being able to signpost to benefits or welfare rights advisors or do the *Better off Calculation* (or sign post to someone who can) for women on benefits, especially those from families with generational worklessness. The implications of taking on loans will need to be considered in the context of overall income for women. This will become acute when considering progression to further training such as Level 3 courses when the forthcoming new fees and loan arrangements are put in place. Training organisations will need to secure this advice in-house or through partners, particularly where there are these specialist requirements.

## **Progression**

Progression is a term used to describe the progress that learners make on their learning journey, the outcomes they achieve, and the benefits and of this learning. This can include progression to a wide range of activity that includes volunteering, enhanced health and well being, and greater financial dependence independence as well as progression to further learning and work.

Once started and as they gain experiences of success in learning, the majority of women are likely to want to progress to further training and/or work. It is important to recognise that progression routes vary, and that progression is not always vertical and linear. It can be horizontal or spiky as some women falter, or need to explore different areas. This is especially true for women who have to interrupt their learning journey because of family pressures or the effects of disadvantage. The speed of progress differs, influenced by factors such as starting point, confidence levels, previous education, lifestyle and personal circumstances. For some it can take several years, with one programme citing six years for some women learners to access employment.

Progression routes and advice therefore need to be tailored and realistic. Staff need accurate and extensive knowledge of other opportunities for employment and learning both within and outside the organisation. Active networks of partners that include other learning providers, employers, agencies and civil society organisations will be important to underpin progression.

### **Progression to employment**

The current economic climate is reducing the number of jobs available in many areas. The case evidence illustrates that progression to employment is more assured where providers have built up relationships with local employers. This will help ensure that the content of the provision equips women to secure employment. It will build employers' confidence that the programme can assist with their recruitment. It will also offer opportunities to work with employers, and, where appropriate, trades unions, to advocate for employment conditions such as flexible hours that make it more feasible for women to take up employment.

Not all women will secure employment by the end of their programme. This means that maintaining their confidence and motivation poses a challenge. Providing facilities for women finishing programmes to continue supported job search can sustain their motivation and chances of success. Similarly, supporting volunteering and work placements beyond the formal programme enhances success in securing employment. Some organisations that offer volunteering opportunities also support

these volunteers into appropriate training that leads to paid employment with them, for example as teachers, administration, outreach or support workers.

*Nottingham Women's Centre provides volunteering opportunities in the centre as a step to moving on (case study 3).*

*Be Enterprising has a successful track record of supporting women beyond the programme to take forward their business ideas into self-employment (case study 8).*

*TCHC offers a job club at the end of the course (case study 6).*

### **Organisational capacity building**

Staffing is crucial to success. Staff at all levels and volunteers must be able to understand and respond to women's situations. It is important that training organisations build their capacity in order to work successfully with diverse women. What is required will depend on the starting point of the organisation and its staff so the first step is to audit this. Employing staff and volunteers who understand the learners and factors affecting women's learning and achievement can be a valuable factor in effective recruitment, retention and success in learning. A staff profile that reflects the local community can attract women and help ensure that the provision is organised to respond to their needs and circumstances.

An effective approach is to recruit and train women from similar backgrounds to the potential learners. 'Home grown' staff include tutors, advisors, mentors, support workers, outreach workers and volunteers. They can provide local knowledge, insights, strategies rooted in real experiences, ensure the programme is welcoming and appropriate and act as role models. It can take time to build up this staff profile. Strategies such as providing volunteering opportunities and training for learners on programmes and local women can support this development

Links with local civil society organisations will assist training providers to learn more about the different issues that potential participants face as well as strategies for addressing them.

## Partnership working

The importance of working with partners and building strong and wide networks has been highlighted. This can be most effective as a planned process. Successful training organisations identify key partners and networks and potential mutual benefits. Partners might include statutory services, third sector partners and employers. They can contribute a vast number of complementary services that include signposting, IAG, support for learning, progression, work experience and volunteering, counselling, and support with challenges beyond the scope of the provider such as debt, housing or mental health. It requires specific effort to build and maintain successful partnerships. Successful providers put time and energy into establishing clarity of purpose and what is required from, and offered to, the relationships. They build trust and confidence, develop shared understanding of values and ethos, and work transparently and efficiently for mutual benefit.

*Nottingham Women's Centre partners include Kamyabi which facilitates access for Asian women by providing an understanding of cultural factors and recruiting learners (case study 3).*

*Durham partners shared best practice in identifying and engaging priority groups (case study 4).*

Partnerships with employers can enable providers to understand what employers are looking for and to convince them of the business benefits of engaging with the training programme. These business benefits might include the contribution of work experience placements, the opportunity to try out potential employees through work experience, low or no cost recruitment, keen employees and support from providers when the trainees transfer into work. These links with employers can also be used to raise their awareness of the potential of women from different backgrounds, including disabled women. This will help combat prejudice and discrimination and enhance these women's employment prospects. They also develop employers' attitudes to flexible working to enable them to benefit from women's skills. This awareness raising has been effectively extended to workforces to dispel myths and build constructive attitudes and relationships which in turn can increase morale and productivity.

## **Case studies**

Ten case studies of good practice were produced. The case studies were selected to represent projects that demonstrate successful work with diverse women, including women experiencing multiple disadvantages, and a regional spread to ensure that geographical differences were taken into account. They included programmes working with both mixed and women only cohorts. This section describes the projects and highlights their effective practice in recruiting, supporting and supporting women to progress. The factor common to them all is that they were very aware of the circumstances of the women participants and had interested and creative staff who put in place a range of solutions to address obstacles that could have impeded success.

### **Case Study 1: South East - Surrey Care Trust: Family and Community Education**

#### **Background**

Surrey Care Trust was set up almost 30 years ago with the main purpose of providing learning opportunities for young people; working in partnership with police and the Probation Service in crime reduction activities. Their work now embraces learning with families, providing both early years and adult learning through Children's Centres; offering opportunities for younger adults through a STEPS programme and second-chance learning for adults. The Trust which has charitable status is supported by a group of patrons and guided and overseen by a board of trustees; it is directed by a chief and deputy chief executive and employs 44 full and part-time staff. Their purpose is to work in partnership to: *"...help people to improve their life chances, and those of their families. Innovative learning, training and volunteering programmes raise people's skill levels, their self-confidence, self-*

*reliance, qualifications and their prospects for employment and continuing education*<sup>25</sup>.

The Family and Community Education (FACE) programme works with large numbers of women who are rebuilding their lives after a crisis or being held back by limited educational achievement. The participants include women who have experienced drug or alcohol abuse; mental ill-health and offending. Some were very young parents and missed out on some schooling and others simply found education unfulfilling and unattractive and 'dropped out' of school. Others were women who had experienced a trauma or dramatic change in their life such as separation, family break-down or illness. Many had limited experiences of employment or not worked for many years.

Most of the Trust's work is located in different areas of the county, operating with and in a wide range of partner organisations and centres. Funding support from the ESF derives from co-financing via the Skills Funding Agency. The Trust has a long history of working with the ESF to reach those who are furthest away from employment and introduce them to ways of learning which many participants never thought possible. ESF funding complements funding from The Trust, partner organisations and fund-raising activities. Annual turnover is approximately £1.5m.

## **Barriers**

Staff are acutely aware that a lack of information about learning opportunities, what learning involves, who learns and where, can create a barrier to participation. Many of the localities in which the Trust operates have little history of participation in continuing adult education and lack any traditional adult learning opportunities. This paucity of provision and absence of an adult learning culture exacerbates barriers stemming from adults having little or no aspiration to learn beyond school, largely related to under-achievement and negative experiences of initial education. The Trust is also well aware of the physical barriers to learning which many women face in relation to lack of local, familiar venues and/or transport

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<sup>25</sup> Surrey Care Trust Impact Report 2009/10.

Women's perceptions of themselves and the perceived expectations of others combine to form barriers. Whilst opportunities for many women have transformed over recent decades, for some, 'traditional' roles are perpetuated. Many of the women with whom the Trust works feel they are dependent upon men at home, and in the workplace, for their roles and identities. Others are disillusioned by the popular media images of 'happy families' knowing that their reality does not meet the expectations projected. Their location in a largely affluent area of the South East of England, adds to the complexity of disadvantage. The 'leafy' middle class areas are punctuated with pockets of severe deprivation, high unemployment and low educational achievement. The sharp socio-economic contrasts add to the sense of 'have not', and low self-worth.

In this complex mixture of disadvantage the biggest barriers women face relate to their attitudes to themselves and learning, along with a lack of confidence in education and learning systems and situations. Many of the life-experiences of potential women learners result in low levels of self-esteem and are associated with drug and alcohol abuse; domestic abuse; mental health issues; being a young lone-parent or never having held a job: *"I didn't really do much when I left school; I didn't stick at anything much and had my children very young. I didn't think I could go back to study thinking, 'I can't do that', especially writing skills"* (Kelly).

Whilst it is relatively straight forward to address geographical and care barriers to learning, the attitudinal and psychological barriers are more complex and deep-rooted in individuals and often in their families and communities. It is this wide range of barriers which The Trust sets out to address.

## **Recruitment**

*"I knock on doors; I know lots of people in the area; I tap into networks in the community and use health visitors, social services and other agencies to help raise awareness about what we do"* (Development worker, teacher and former Trust learner).

The Trust targets those women who under-achieved in their initial education experiences and/or who feel limited by their life situations. They deliberately do not

work with 'yummy mummies' which would be easy to do, in the affluent areas of Surrey. Outreach work, to ensure that the Trust's mission of working with specific adults and their families is a key feature of their adult learning services. This involves not only taking provision to particular, identified communities but also reaching out to new and different learners. Community facilitators, and development workers (who are often also teachers), who live within the target areas, are trained to informally network and make links with schools, Children's Centres, health centres, libraries, voluntary and community organisations, Jobcentre Plus and other learning providers. They also work with groups and organisations to identify the sorts of learning opportunities which they feel would help their agendas. Activities, courses and programmes are developed through partnership and negotiation. For example, the Trust works with Children's Centres to offer parenting activities, family learning and family literacy; it works with Jobcentre Plus to offer individualised support to access relevant and appropriate informal learning as first steps into training for work. The Trust has become so well known in the areas in which it operates, that organisations often contact the staff and ask for learning opportunities to be created.

Another vital aspect of outreach work and recruitment is being known in particular communities and areas. The facilitators are often 'home-grown'; many come from the area, were drawn into learning by the Trust and over many years have developed their skills, knowledge and qualifications to help others in similar situations to themselves: *"I was a young mum, and ex-offender, used drugs and had mental health issues; I overcame these barriers. Other women can't tell me, 'You don't understand'"* (Development worker, teacher and former Trust learner).

This development worker not only helps the women to address the complex barriers they face but also acts as a role model. Others, who know her and her background, begin to realise that lives can be changed; women can begin to take charge of the decisions they face and engaging in learning opportunities can be the first step in that direction. This aspect is a powerful recruitment activity.

The Trust takes a 'hands-off' approach to managing the facilitators and development workers. Their outreach activities can be very informal and opportunity-driven; conversations take place at school gates, in high streets, in community centres and engagement often happens because women chat about the life challenges they are

facing. Many of these conversations relate to parenting, returning to work, their roles and identities and stress. Members of staff are clear that they are not counsellors but they are trained to make referrals to other support agencies, where necessary. However, such conversations create opportunities to talk about the learning content of parenting workshops or courses or to discuss what happens on personal development programmes and women are invited to join a group which looks at some of the problems outlined or share their experiences with other women in similar situations.

When women express, albeit tentative, interest in the provision, the facilitators and development workers are able to offer 1:1 support. This includes meeting women to introduce them to groups or other organisations; it also involves acting as a 'buddy' to support them in referrals to other organisations. Such individualised and personalised recruitment approaches help to ensure a good match between the women and learning. They seem to join learning activities because of the personal approaches, the apparent high levels of relevance to their lives and the fact that someone 'like them' is encouraging and supporting them. Learners reported how childcare was a great support because, *"you don't have to go and find someone and ask a favour"* (Mandi).

They also said that having free learning opportunities encouraged them to join groups. The Trust also has a 'pram-pushing' policy, meaning they offer provision within walking distance of the communities they seek to serve. The provision of child-care support is offered to those who want it.

## **Training**

There are no fixed start and end dates to programmes; they are generally planned and negotiated in partnership with learners, referral organisations and the development workers. The Trust does not produce a prospectus. Once a few women have expressed an interest, dates are agreed and other women encouraged and supported to join. At other times, the courses are requested by partner organisations and these are arranged in negotiation with them. In such cases the partners have identified the women who are potential learners. Whilst the Trust offers learning to both men and women, many groups run with only women.

The introductory courses usually last for two hours each week, for five or six weeks and contain high amounts of 'personal development' material; they are designed to explore issues in which the women have expressed an interest or concern and begin to build confidence. Their short duration is also designed to invite a commitment to learning which longer courses might not achieve. These courses are informed by approaches which help participants to realise they can change the way they see themselves and the way they respond to relationships, situations and challenges in their lives. Such features are introduced gently and whilst the content of the courses might be seen as 'fluffy' there is a clear rationale, purpose and rigour in their delivery.

Courses on different aspects of parenting attract many adults to return to learning. It is often out of concern for their children that women are prepared to take the steps to return to learning for themselves: *"I had a lot of trouble with my son and it was difficult to get support. R told me about the PD [personal development] course and encouraged me to join in. It made me think about myself and my situation"* (K).

Where people expressed particular interests, issues or developmental ideas during early discussions and recruitment, the Trust believes that it is vital to honour them and ensure that learning matches expectations. The courses are predominantly planned and delivered in partnership with Children's Centres and schools but have high levels of negotiation in their design. The same NLP approaches run through the introductory courses. All courses pick up on the concerns and issues revealed by the participants. It is through many years of experience that the Trust realises the commonality of many of the challenges faced by women and their families at particular stages of their lives. The staff use these to create a 'core' curriculum, designed to raise confidence in the learners' current roles and explore next steps in learning. Progression opens up opportunities for learning on any one of the modules offered by the Trust, in the localities where learners live. For others it involves referral to other agencies and organisations.

In the process of exploring life challenges through personal development activities, many people reveal a desire to look to the future when individual and family life can be enhanced through employment. Due to the fragmented and insecure nature of much former employment, if any, these steps are small and very much linked to the interests expressed by the women. All the courses are designed to build self-confidence in both learning and themselves as employable people. The range of courses available include Personal Development, First Aid, ICT, parenting courses and back to work courses, including preparation for recruitment interviews. Some of these include units of Open College Network accreditation. It is the total package of options which allows for flexible, customised programmes.

The latest ESF report (December 2010) identified that of 299 women, 134 women completed non accredited courses and 165 completed accredited courses. Fourteen women found employment in the year ending December 2010.

## **Retention**

The Family and Community Education programme has a high retention rate of 98 per cent. There are many clearly thought through ways of supporting the women to stay on their chosen learning routes.

Group sizes are deliberately small so that lots of personal attention can be given; these are generally 8-10, but can be 4-6 participants. The Trust's status means they attract and raise 'other' sources of funding which are not tied to the same sorts of outputs that many government funding streams require. Mixing funding provides opportunities to offer extra and individual support. This also enables women to take small steps, building confidence, experiencing different opportunities, exploring and developing their skills. They can move 'sideways' in horizontal progression patterns, taking up new opportunities as they explore potential. Partner organisations often pay the Trust to provide courses and learning opportunities in order to support their clients. Typically these are offender organisations, such as the Probation Service.

Learners identify that the groups themselves provide support; knowing that others share similar experiences and challenges helps the women to feel less isolated and begins to remove any sense that their circumstances are unique. One learner reported: *“I kept on learning because I made friends, people said, ‘Hello’ and were friendly; this made me feel I was worth something after all. Having people from the same background was helpful”* (Mandi). This learner felt so afraid of joining the group that she took her mother along with her. She believed that would not have been possible in a large college but the supportive, flexible environment at Surrey Care Trust enabled her to then move on to greater independence.

Occasionally facilitators and teachers work in pairs enabling one member of staff to work intensively with a learner, if needed. In the process of addressing complex personal barriers, some learners reveal painful experiences of the past and the team support enables issues to be dealt with rapidly: *“When we work in pairs, one of us can take a learner out of the group to address individual needs and agree ways forward. We don’t counsel but we do know how to support and refer women who need it. We know about drugs and alcohol services. We can take them to further appointments if they wish”* (Development worker, teacher and former Trust learner).

When working with partner organisations, particularly the Probation Service, their staff are also often present. Such support helps hesitant learners to address the attitudinal barriers which might prevent learning and on-going participation; it also helps them to feel valued.

Facilitators and development workers often phone or send text messages to learners, to remind them of group meetings or to enquire after their well-being. These strategies help to keep learners supported and active. However, this means staff work on Sunday evenings, especially when groups are meeting on Monday and use of mobile phones at that time of the week can challenge administrative systems:

*“Our finance staff wondered why development staff were using their work phones at the weekends. We explained how this is an important way of keeping learners on track”* (Programme Manager).

The 'pick and mix' approach of small units of learning helps to keep learners on the programme. They are able to 'have a go', gain a certificate of recognition for small 'chunks' of learning and identify where their interests and aptitudes lie. One learner suggested: *"Doing little courses was helpful for me to see what I was good at and enjoyed as well as those things I didn't enjoy. You get a certificate for all your efforts and that makes you feel good about learning"* (Mandi).

When asking what learners gained, it is clear that the main purposes of building confidence, promoting self-esteem, growing aspiration and a sense of 'I can do' are achieved: *"Having been a stay at home mum bringing up my children, I felt I had lost the confidence and belief in myself to return to work. However, thanks to the courses run by the Surrey Care Trust at my daughter's school, and the excellent tutors who ran these courses, I was able to learn new skills in First Aid, computing and interview and CV techniques. Armed with what I had learnt these courses improved my self-confidence, gave me a more positive approach to finding a job and, most of all, made me feel employable again. As a result and feeling better equipped to deal with interview situations, I applied for and indeed got myself a job working in a pre-school. A feeling of confidence and capability has been restored"* (A).

## **Progression**

The whole purpose of the work of the Trust, in all its different activities, is to keep people moving forward, to seek out new opportunities for learning, volunteering and working. Progression is, therefore, a serious aspect of their work. Nevertheless, this is combined with a realism which suggests that some people need a long time to build their confidence, explore possible routes, make mistakes and feel positive about learning from them, before moving along and up a learning ladder.

After their first experiences, women learners may not be ready to explore particular employment avenues but having gained some satisfaction and confidence on their first course, are keen to continue learning. Taking up interest-based courses such as Indian Head Massage or more detailed parenting or child-development course

can be described as 'horizontal' progression. Nevertheless, as the immovable core values of the organisation are to support change through adult and community learning, such progression opportunities are seen as vital to foster the love of learning and the impact it can have on individuals.

Some learners move on to accredited courses, predominantly awarded by the Open College Network. These opportunities are offered by the Family and Community Education programme as well as through partner organisations and local colleges of further education. Many learners find that taking up practical courses such as introductions to alternative therapies, health and social care, child care or ICT help them to develop study skills too. Where learners are referred to other organisations, the same personal approach is used as when learners took their first steps. Information about partner organisations' courses is shared, appointments to meet new staff arranged and learners accompanied to their new learning location.

Opportunities to move on to skills development through working with a Community Interest Company called Holistic Harmony<sup>26</sup> provides a stepping stone to a real work environment. This company offers training in a wide range of alternative therapies as well as services to the public, using the learners and volunteers. Through on-going skills development and accreditation, learners can then begin to use their skills at corporate events, with companies and for the public. Learners can progress to becoming volunteers who continue to practise and develop their skills but who are also supported to look more actively for paid employment opportunities. In March 2011 they had 28 volunteers.

Holistic Harmony provides mentors, who have business skills and experience, to support the trainees and volunteers. Some women feel that self-employment is the route for them as it can offer greater flexibility when combining work with family and domestic responsibilities, particularly for women who are lone parents: *"We see that self-employment is a route forward but there is not much support for this; women are afraid of losing their benefits and there is little to offer them financial support in the transition"* (Director of Holistic Harmony).

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.holisticharmonycic.org.uk/index.html>

Holistic Harmony acts as an intermediary between working in a 'for profit' organisation where the pressures and demands are perhaps too great for some women at a particular stage in their development. However, as a Community Interest Company, it offers the features of employment with higher levels of personal and individual support.

Other volunteering opportunities arise through working with the Trust's two narrow boats, Swingbridge Community Boats, which are used by community groups and organisations. They develop skills associated with the running and maintenance of the boats as well as those of caring and providing services for the children and community members who use them. Again, the Trust believes that the practical nature of the volunteering provides a great basis for confidence-building as well as relevance and purpose for theory and the skills needed to succeed in learning.

Course organisers suggested that it can take up to 6 years for a hesitant, reluctant learner to address individual barriers and become a confident person who is not afraid to speak out, who will engage with agencies such as schools or social services or in activities in their community, including taking up employment.

A former learner, K, described her learning journey: *"After joining a course, I was helped to volunteer with the Youth Justice Board. I got some good experience and then started to volunteer as a support teacher with young people on the STEPS programme [for young people who are disillusioned with school]. I did my PTLLS (Preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector) and moved on to CTLLS (Certificate in teaching in the lifelong learning sector). I now work at East Surrey College for 15 hours a week teaching personal and social development to vocational students"*.

In the year ending December 2010, 50 women went on work placements and 14 women found employment.

## Partnership working

The Trust works with almost 70 companies, 24 Grant Making Trusts and over 30 organisations<sup>27</sup> which include schools, universities, clubs, local authorities and the police and probation services as supporters of their work. Some of these are valuable donors, as over £300,000 was raised from grants, individual and community donations and corporate donations in 2009/10. Others are more active partners such as schools and Children's Centres, Jobcentre Plus, church and community centres, housing and homelessness associations and traveller organisations. Partners offer shared values and complementary purposes, referrals, accommodation, sign-posting and reach to the women the Trust seeks to support.

The Trust feels it has a strong identity in the county supported by very large networks; it has worked via networks from the outset. The large size of the networks can be both an asset and a challenge. The network is not static but is complex and changes in response to the challenge of, "*who we are not reaching*" (Programme Manager). This means that supporters and partners demand time and energy of the Trust to ensure a best match of purposes and the outcomes sought from their joint working. Existing supporters are keen to see the continuing outcomes of their links and investments whilst new ones need help to understand the ethos, purposes and outcomes of becoming active in the networked relationship.

## Success factors

### *Recruitment*

- outreach work, in particular locations and with specific target groups;
- learning located in a wide range of community venues;
- persistence, encouragement and support of the development workers for potential (and existing) learners, using phone calls and face to face conversation;

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<sup>27</sup> Surrey Care Trust Impact Report 2009/10.

- strong partnerships and networks for referrals to (and from) the Trust, including colleges of further education.

### *Retention*

- small groups with occasional team teaching to optimise learner support;
- personalised, individualised support throughout the learning experience;
- ‘home grown’ facilitators who have experienced many of the barriers faced by the women and who have opportunities to develop their skills and qualifications to become development workers and teachers;
- strong and wide networks which provide support from diverse organisations including private, community and statutory agencies;
- certification for all courses completed with external accreditation opportunities available.

### *Progress*

- offering a range of learning opportunities which offer both horizontal and vertical progression
- providing opportunities for learners to progress to volunteering work placements, providing real work environments
- support for learners to progress to employment and self-employment.

### **Contact details**

Surrey Care Trust

07789985582

[Bridget.Newbould@SurreyCareTrust.org.uk](mailto:Bridget.Newbould@SurreyCareTrust.org.uk)

## **Case Study 2: South West - Weymouth College: Personal Best Programme**

### **Background**

Weymouth College is a general FE college with a mission to provide lifelong learning with progression from Foundation to Higher Education. It is centrally located in Weymouth, a coastal town surrounded by rural Dorset. Weymouth is host to the 2012 Olympic sailing events. The area attracts ESF funding because of high levels of rural deprivation.

When launched in 2009 the Personal Best programme mainly attracted men but as the programme has progressed the female profile has increased. Of the 99 starters 29 are women, 11 have completed, 10 have withdrawn or are taking a temporary break and 11 have successfully completed the programme and the 20 hours of volunteering. The majority of the learners (65 per cent) are aged 36-55 with only three women in the 56-70 age bracket. The area is 98 per cent white British and this is reflected in the course profile.

The Adult Skills Curriculum Manager designed the programme to complement the Basic Skills and the Access provision. Personal Best is almost entirely taught by a part-time female tutor with a drama background who has current involvement in event management. There is a course administrator who leads on recruitment and liaison with partner organisations and the key referral agencies. Attendance and progression tracking are also incorporated into her role.

### **Barriers**

Many of the women experience multiple disadvantages -the programme attracts a higher than average number of women with a disability (44 per cent), a significant number of lone parents, and women with long-term health issues or recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. Ten per cent of the women have no previous qualifications. The number of carers is unknown but some of the parents have school age children with quite significant additional health or emotional needs and some have children who are in care. Depression and low self-esteem brought about through ill health and addiction problems seem to be the most debilitating barriers.

For example, Joanne was in full time employment, a county athlete who ran a local football team whilst bringing up four children until a major car crash in 2002 brought her life to a halt. She has not worked since and before the Personal Best programme has experienced long periods of being housebound with depression and health difficulties. Joanne's disability adviser suggested the programme to her and made the initial contact with the Personal Best administrator: *"I didn't have time to stop and think and have second thoughts, S (the course administrator) was on the phone to me within 40 minutes and then met me at reception when I went for an interview and even took me to my first class"*. Joanne has now successfully completed the programme and applied to become an Olympic Games maker: *"I was so down for so long and the course bought me confidence and gave me something to come out of the house for. When you're depressed you need structure in your life and I didn't know how to start again...this gave me something to get up for and helps me get a healthy head"*.

## **Recruitment**

A number of the women on the programme have been referred by advisers specialising in supporting adults with a disability, addiction, or mental health needs, or via the Weymouth Community Volunteers. Contact via Jobcentre Plus has been less successful due to frequent staff changes. Although there are press advertisements, posters, leaflets and a presence on the College website, the main recruitment route is via word of mouth which partly accounts for the growing number of women on the programme since its inception.

A prompt response to the initial referral and follow through by the course administrator and tutor is crucial to reassuring uncertain prospective students - lack of confidence is seen as the single biggest barrier. The course is held from 9.30 am - 2.30 pm term-time only for between eight and 10 weeks which enables women with school age children to participate but there is no childcare provided for younger children. Some College funding is available for childcare but is little used.

## Training

The Personal Best course was ESF funded from August 2009 to March 2011 and extended to December 2011. The programme is a mixed course aimed at building self-esteem and employability skills through the vehicle of event management and volunteering. It is of a flexible duration but usually an eight week period and the typical attendance pattern is 9.30 am -2.30 pm Monday and Tuesday over three to six months, delivered on the main College site and at off-site visitor attractions such as The Pavilion. The course includes 20 hours' practical experience in event management. The accreditation is Preparation for Event Volunteering L1. English and Maths are also on offer and the women are encouraged to access ICT.

The underpinning ethos of the course is that positive and safe experiences of role play and group work help build the confidence and self-esteem that helps secure work as a volunteer which in turn is a valuable step towards paid employment.

Boosting self-esteem and developing a group ethos is the tutor's number one priority as it is crucial to retaining the women and to the successful introduction of role play in weeks two and three: *"In the first week we focus upon teamwork, getting peer support in place and boosting trust. We always make reminder calls before the first class just to reassure waverers that it will be ok. If anyone misses a session they are rung straight away and this gives them the message that we value them"* (Tutor).

Each learner has a file containing the bespoke course content separated into 10 bite sized units on topics such as becoming a volunteer, understanding equality and diversity, effective customer relations, teamwork and interpersonal skills, public safety awareness, emergencies and basic fire awareness, introduction to conflict resolution in a public setting, preparing for a volunteer placement and volunteering and the Olympic Games. Gapped worksheets incorporated within the units encourage written work and self-profiling grids encourage on-going reflection to boost self-esteem.

Participants take part in two site visits to the Sailing Academy and The Pavilion. These are an important element of the course and serve to provide a stimulus to pre- and post-visit classroom activities which might involve 'light hearted' role-playing of a difficult customer or handling a safety incident. The visits are enjoyed by the women who like having behind the scenes access to local attractions. The volunteering component also raises aspirations by opening the door to events such as the World Shotgun Championships, Beach Live, the Seafood Festival, Carnival or theatrical performances at the Pavilion.

## **Retention**

Support from course staff appears to be critical in helping women stay the course, for example, as Joanne described above, the course administrator met her at the College reception and accompanied her to her first session.

Finding themselves in a similar situation to other women on the programme often proves to be reassuring and can help women start the process of rebuilding their confidence as the story of Lesley illustrates. Lesley, in her early 40s, appears very outgoing but admits to being very depressed before commencing the Personal Best course following a breakdown due to work related stress. Lesley is a lone parent with four children, including a daughter with acrophobia<sup>28</sup>. During the course and her volunteering placement she developed her talent for using waste rubbish to create props and is now working towards becoming self-employed with several offers of work, including one from the College Drama department and from a London Theatre: *"It is scary and you think you are on your own but when you walk through the door you realise that you're not which does so much for your confidence...it burst my bubble coming here and now I'm blooming!"* (Lesley).

## **Progression**

Some of the women on Personal Best have applied to be Olympic Games makers and are awaiting interviews. Nationally, up to 10 per cent of Games Time volunteers are expected to be drawn from people who have successfully completed the

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<sup>28</sup> Extreme or irrational fear of heights.

Personal Best programme. The remainder are pursuing a variety of progression routes including volunteering, attending other short courses, part-time employment, Higher Education or self-employment: *“If there is a gap between the interview and the start of the next group we try and offer some other learning like Maths and English and when the programme is finished we try and keep them learning by offering additional courses such as First Aid and IT”* (Tutor).

Course outcomes are sometimes life changing. The women are encouraged to ‘pop back’ and through this contact the tutor knows of several families that have been reunited by Social Services, in part due to the impact the course has had upon the mothers’ ability to care for their children.

For example, until the age of 25 Victoria worked full- time in the finance industry. Due to alcohol and drug addiction, which she describes as a *“rocky 10 years”*, she was left homeless and isolated. She joined the Personal Best course as a result of a referral from Weymouth Community Volunteers and is now working part-time in an adult care home whilst completing an Access course prior to application to university.

## **Partnership working**

Key partners are Weymouth Community Volunteers, Alcohol and Drug Community Aftercare Programme (ADCAP), Probation Service, Jobcentre Plus, the Sailing Academy and the Pavilion Theatre.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- time invested in developing and sustaining partnerships with local referral agencies who work with disadvantaged women;
- pre-course interviews screen out ‘unready’ women so they can undertake more appropriate provision as a prequel to Personal Best;
- clear messages about whether participants are expected to find their own volunteering/work placement.

## *Retention*

- inspirational and flexible tutor(s) with right skill set in drama and event management;
- continuity of staffing and wrap-around approach to learner support;
- bespoke, user friendly and relevant course materials structured to guide the learning process;
- standalone units of learning increase flexibility and enable extended patterns of completion or re-engagement, instead of withdrawal;
- very prompt and individualised contact with participants to remind them to attend;
- practical work balanced with visits to interesting workplaces and classroom discussion/ role play;
- role play sensitively introduced in stages to build trust and confidence and linked directly to volunteering skills.

## *Progress*

- open door access for six months after the course and regular contact through text, email and a newsletter;
- further free short courses to sustain peer contact and reinforce the confidence and skills gained from the Personal Best programme.

## **Contact details**

Julie Ellis

Weymouth College

01305 208849

[julie\\_ellis@weymouth.ac.uk](mailto:julie_ellis@weymouth.ac.uk)

## **Case Study 3: East Midlands - Nottingham Women's Centre: Skills for Jobs**

### **Background**

Skills for Jobs takes place within the range of provision and support available in the Nottingham Women's Centre which is an organisation with a long and successful record of working with women who come to the centre with a wide variety of issues. Founded in 1971, its activities have been developed to meet the identified needs of the women who attend. It is open to women who live and work in the County of Nottinghamshire. Governance is through a Management Committee made up of Centre users alongside community representatives and professional women from the area. The Centre has 6 full time and 15 part-time staff and approximately 25 volunteers. It is home to three other women's organisations, Rape Crisis, Women's Aid integrated services and Roshni— an organisation which supports and provides refuge for South Asian women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence or are living with an abusive partner/family. The Centre runs courses and learning activities, projects, a range of alternative therapies and a programme aimed at helping women in danger of offending – CHANGES (Creating Hope Achieving New Goals Experiencing Success). It also houses a crèche offering in-house day care for children up to the age of five. Support is offered to a wide variety of women's self-help groups.

The Centre is located in Nottingham City Centre. It obtained ESF funding through a competitive bidding process but the Centre had a record of success in this area of work having previously run a LSC/ESF project.

The staff directly involved are:

- the Centre Chief Executive whose role is the oversight of the project, monitoring progress against targets, liaison with partners, staff training and sourcing funding;
- the training co-ordinator who is responsible for this and other training programmes at the Centre as well as IAG and 1-to-1 support for participants;
- the student support worker who is responsible for support, action planning and recruitment in conjunction with the other members of staff;

- teaching on the programmes is carried out by staff from Castle College, Nottingham with support and workshop activities provided by the Centre staff mentioned above.

## **Barriers**

The majority of women engaged at the Centre had serious personal issues including experience of domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Most learners had negative experiences and pessimistic expectations of education. A large number of women had mental health issues and long term unemployment was commonplace.

Kamyabi, the partnership organisation, identified cultural, language and attitudinal barriers such as lack of confidence amongst Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, mainly Pakistani, attending provision at their centre such as the inability to attend training where men were present. Anila from the partner organisation Kamyabi expressed this combination of factors “*shyness means no words coming in our mouth – language is most problem*”.

The women were often of limited financial means and the costs of travel and childcare were significant barriers to attendance. Many had young children and some had significantly chaotic lifestyles that meant regular attendance was challenging. The staff described how a multiplicity of barriers contributed to these chaotic lifestyles making regular commitment to learning very problematic. For example, Wendy, had experienced domestic and sexual abuse, had been in the care system, had young children and had been a drug user whilst another learner had experienced domestic violence, mental health issues and had significant issues with low self-confidence.

## **Recruitment**

The programme has recruited about 180 women during its period of operation. The Centre uses a number of different and complementary strategies for recruitment. The organisers have a large database of organisations where brochures and fliers are placed including local libraries, health centres and hospitals. An early strategy for recruitment with stands at local supermarkets, though successful, was

discontinued when supermarkets would no longer support it. Local radio was identified as a useful recruitment tool as was networking with other organisations. However, open days and information days are a less significant form of recruitment.

Case study material evidenced referrals between organisations as a major recruitment tool. Jobcentre Plus referrals were increasing particularly amongst Jobcentre Plus staff that had either visited the Women's Centre or had been visited by a member of the team. There is also significant traffic between activities within the Centre and learners are referred between the various groups and courses available with the overall aim of supporting women in their progression.

The power of word of mouth as a recruitment tool was paramount. Kamyabi, for example, has a limited budget and in the BME community word of mouth was the most important form of recruitment to its services. Word of mouth, whether between women in a similar position or between women and staff/workers in other organisations seemed to be the most significant recruitment tool, mainly because such contacts provide reassurance about the course and the support the Centre offers. Women from Kamyabi valued the opportunity to learn with other women from the same cultural background.

Women frequently sign up to the course because they need to gain specific skills e.g. ICT or childcare or because they wish to move into another area of employment. Another motivator is to improve confidence and to find out about employment opportunities. Focus group participants overcame barriers to engage in the training with the support and understanding that the team offered as well as childcare provision.

## **Training**

The aim is to enable the women to progress to employment and/or FE and training. The programme is extremely flexible and tailored entirely to the needs of the women recruited to the course. This flexibility is complemented by the course sitting within the wider offer of activities available at the Centre. The women themselves do not differentiate between these activities and this is clearly strength since the other activities make for a richer offer and better support for the women.

About 180 women have passed through the course but the length of stay has varied from a couple of months to over two years. The key elements of the programme are Basic Skills, ICT, self-confidence and assertiveness, individual 1-to-1 support, CV preparation, employability skills and job search support. Kamyabi, a partner in delivery, also offers ESOL, sewing and food hygiene courses at a neighbourhood centre. Groups have a maximum of 12 participants. At the Women's Centre participants can take part in yoga, Reiki, massage and crystal therapies run mainly by volunteers alongside the course itself.

All activities are women only. The women engaged on the programme are over 19; 30 to 40 per cent are from BME groups and most are aged 30 to 50. However, there has been a recent influx of women to the course in their late 20's possibly because of the weak economic climate. Most of the women have low educational attainment and low or no qualifications. A number have specific learning difficulties including Dyslexia and Asperger's Syndrome.

## **Retention**

Managers, partners and learners all consider the support for the women on the course to be the key to its success. Because of the multiple barriers that the learners face, flexibility and appreciation of their problems is considered essential if they are to remain engaged. Learners are expected to attend the course as agreed and if they are unable to do so they will make contact with staff. Apart from this stipulation, the course team exercise as much flexibility as they can to enable the women to complete the course and become "job ready". The learners were especially appreciative of the flexibility and support of the understanding they had received when unable to attend because of family crises or poorly children.

The retention rate on the course is high with around 10 per cent of learners withdrawing between initial assessment and course commencement. More than 80 per cent of learners complete the programme.

All learners receive an initial assessment and subsequent action plan. This is considered and revised as necessary at five weekly 1-to-1 meetings with a member of the course team. This 1-to-1 mentoring relationship is at the heart of the support given during the course as is the consistency of having a member of staff involved who will meet outside the five weekly regular meeting by appointment to deal with additional matters that arise.

The goals agreed for the women are designed to provide early and continuing success: *“it doesn’t matter where you start from you don’t feel people’s looking down at you or you can’t do it”* (Lorna).

The other services at the Centre also contribute to keeping the women on track. Advice is readily available on managing debt, housing, and avoiding criminal behaviour as well as help relating to drug abuse and domestic violence. The range of therapeutic activities was mentioned by the women as a very important part of the support available helping with stress, promoting relaxation and improving feelings of self-worth.

### **Progression**

The Centre provides volunteering opportunities as a step to employment for the women on the course; either at the Centre itself or at partner organisations. The women view this work as satisfying, giving them confidence and helping to build and re-enforce their skills. Volunteering opportunities were available in the crèche, at reception and in a range of other roles. Women are encouraged to consider qualifications in the fields of work they volunteer in.

### **Partnerships**

The Women’s Centre has a long and successful history of working with vulnerable women and with a wide range of partners. The Skills for Jobs programme benefits from these partnerships and networks even when there is no formal link with the course itself. There are a number of specific partners of key importance in relation to ESF provision:

*Kamyabi*: an organisation primarily focused on women within the Asian communities in Hyson Green, Nottingham. Provision is made in the area and is women only. The women attending this provision appreciate being able to learn in the company of women from their own culture who understand their family issues. They stated that they would have felt uncomfortable at first, learning alongside women from other cultures. Working with Kamyabi has been advantageous in terms of recruiting from a very isolated group who would not travel to the Women's Centre of their own volition. Whilst it has been challenging to develop a financial monitoring system and auditing regime that works for both partners, Kamyabi felt that the partnership with the Women's Centre was successful because both were grassroots organisations with realistic expectations of women facing multiple barriers.

*Working Links*: a private sector training organisation which was part of a parallel project and whilst working relationships were not made easy by the complex paperwork involved in working together or the brokerage/referral system that was in place, over the course of the project a workable relationship has emerged.

*Enable*: is the umbrella organisation for the Voluntary and Community Sector in Nottinghamshire. It subcontracts and part finances Basic Skills and ICT training.

*Castle College*: Responsible for delivery of the personal effectiveness part of the training.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- a women only environment is an important consideration for some women whether for cultural reasons, personal preference or because of confidence issues;
- flexibility –learners genuinely appreciated the ability of staff to respond to the women's circumstances with a truly flexible offer;

- word of mouth is a crucial recruitment method;
- referrals – getting staff from JCP to visit and vice versa resulted in more referrals to the Centre;
- working in partnership with a community organisation like Kamyabi gave BME women an opportunity to engage with the programme in a community location when they would never have considered visiting the Centre.

### *Retention*

- excellent learner support – a combination of a support worker and the range of support offered by the Centre itself helped women stay the course;
- housing and supporting other local organisations at the Centre provides a secure and responsive support system to help staff support women's complex lives;
- a range of activities and organisations within the Centre that provides richness to the course experience that might not be easily reproduced but is a key factor in making the women feel comfortable and valued;
- 1-to-1 weekly mentoring support gives the women consistent support.

### *Progress*

- opportunities for internal progression within the Centre
- opportunities to volunteer at the Centre provide women with a useful stepping stone to the workplace and help build confidence.

### **Contact details**

Nottingham Women's Centre

0115 941 1475

Chief Executive: [anette@nottinghamwomenscentre.com](mailto:anette@nottinghamwomenscentre.com)

## **Case Study 4: North East - Durham County Council Adult Learning ESF ESOL Project**

### **Background**

Durham County Council Adult Learning Service works with a wide range of partners, including local colleges and the voluntary and community sector, to develop adult education opportunities for people across County Durham. The Service operates from its main office in Durham city and in centres across the county, which has a mixture of large rural areas and small towns. There are significant areas of disadvantage.

When delivering the Agency contracts, the Adult Learning Service (ALS) builds upon its experience, expertise and existing community learning infrastructure, to deliver provision for Skills for Life, vocational Learning, work based learning, First Steps/Foundation Learning and Learning for Personal and Community Development. The programme is delivered through accredited and non-accredited structured learning which offers achievement and progression. This provision widens participation, responds to community needs and raises learners' self-esteem, aspirations and attainment, thereby contributing to the social and economic regeneration of County Durham. As County Durham has some of the lowest levels of basic skills in the United Kingdom, improving the basic skills of the population is a key service priority

Durham County Council (DCC) was one of a number of local authorities invited to tender for ESF funding to support the implementation of the 'New Approach to ESOL'. DCC has a lot of experience of engaging with hard to reach groups of potential learners and the main aim of the funding was to target individuals with little or no English Language currently not accessing ESOL, to engage them in ESOL provision (pre-entry) with a view to progressing them into mainstream Entry Level or above ESOL provision or other learning. Target groups were required to be living in settled communities but who speak little or no English, economically inactive or claiming Jobcentre Plus unemployment benefits.

Fifty women in the 25 – 49 age range were engaged in the project and identified themselves as Asian, Black African, Black Caribbean, Chinese and White European, e.g. Irish, Polish<sup>29</sup>. Many of these learners came from areas of deprivation and social isolation. Learners lived in urban and rural areas including Consett, Chester le Street, Ferryhill, Sedgfield, Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe. Some lived in close proximity to each other in communities where their first language was the language of choice for all discourse, for example, a group lived on the same street in Bowburn.

Staff involved included specialist tutors from the DCC ALS Skills for Life Unit qualified to deliver ESOL, as well as additional support tutors to aid the specialist tutor in the classroom. Development workers employed by DCC worked on the project to engage individual learners, link up with voluntary and community agencies, schools and faith groups. The Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) worked with the project to give information on settled communities and schools with high numbers of children with an ethnic minority background.

The project also employed a Co-ordinator whose main role was to monitor progress on engagements, ensure financial and statistical data was recorded correctly on MIS systems and ready for monthly returns to the Agency.

Regular meetings with all staff involved were held during the project to share good practice, information and progress on engagement.

## **Barriers**

The barriers relate to the characteristics of the women and funding constraints. (Without this kind of project) “This particular client group would be missed in mainstream funding. They need additional support and there is no enhanced funding for that. This was an ideal piece of funding to pick them up and not have to worry about adding to targets. The project allowed the women to be encouraged to move into mainstream and then count towards targets”. These learners were identified as

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<sup>29</sup> The project also engaged with men but women were the significant majority.

'risky' for providers – high cost and problematic in terms of what counts. “Providers are reluctant to search for these kinds of learners. This project enables providers to manage the risk”.

The challenges the women accessing the project faced include:

- speaking little or no English language;
- feeling excluded/isolated and having difficulty engaging/integrating with communities outside of their own;
- little access to services, resources, community facilities;
- economic/financial difficulties;
- living in deprived and disadvantaged areas;
- living in non-decent housing;
- hard to reach and engage with;
- living within a settled community where only their first language is spoken;
- having a primary role as a carer (of children, elders or other family/community members), with very poor skills and no work experience;
- experiencing cultural issues influencing their opportunities for accessing learning or entering employment for example, mixed gender classes;
- low-level aspirations, low wage job prospects;
- economically inactive or unemployed claiming Jobcentre Plus unemployment benefits;
- lack of confidence, work experience and formal qualifications;
- barriers to accessing learning such as lack of childcare and transport;
- are currently not accessing learning provision.

## **Recruitment**

Engagement activities included coffee mornings, drop-in engagement events at local libraries and other community venues, working with known & trusted community champions to influence and engage. A lot of engagement was via schools with a high percentage of BME children, for example, basic fliers were circulated in school

bags with other information for parents. The other most important marketing element was the link with community engagement officers attached to community centres.

Work also took place with local agencies and community organisations to ensure all outreach and development workers disseminated information about the project opportunity including Parent Support Advisers and local community networks

The decision was taken to provide IAG through tutors and development workers rather than IAG professionals. Feedback from the learners supports the value of this approach. The women valued the relationship between themselves and the project staff and the trust that developed. The women are pre-entry and IAG was tailored to this and appropriate progression into mainstream provision. However, access to specialist Next Step advisers was offered as a further option.

Initial IAG was adapted to meet the needs of the target group. An initial assessment was carried out for each learner, to ensure that individual needs were identified. A realistic ILP was developed identifying the appropriate learning styles. This approach to initial assessment built upon previous experience of engaging and delivering to ESOL learners and adapting provision to meet their needs.

A tutorial system was established to support learners throughout their programme. IAG was embedded throughout; including an end of course review.

A range of voluntary/community groups had a role in the initial engagement of participants and also providing local community venues for delivery.

Delivery partners actively engaged with individuals and a variety of intermediary bodies to support engagement onto the programme, to maintain retention and facilitate progression. For example:

EMTAS which already supports BME (Black & Minority Ethnic) groups

Some partners are members of the (LSC) ESOL Regional Network<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This was originally the LSC ESOL Regional Network. LAs were given the remit to drive the new approach to ESOL and form partnerships to take the agenda forward.

Links with private and social housing providers so that they can refer potential learners

Links with cultural and faith organisations

Links through Personal and Community Development Learning and in partnership with community organisations, appropriate delivery venues were identified

Liaison with schools with a high number of ESOL students, Parent Support Advisors, Children's Centres. Leaflets included in children's book bags to inform parents

Engagement campaigns included leaflet drops in community centres, health centres and households using posters in various languages

Working with Community Liaison Officers and outreach workers to link with the voluntary/community sector

Word of mouth as friends, family and local communities talk about the programme.

The project ensured that support services including language support, transport and/or childcare were available. Where there were one or two learners in adjoining villages, community transport was organised from a central point. Flexible delivery times, short programme length, community outreach venues reducing the need to travel were all in place to overcome the external barriers.

## **Training**

Thirteen six week programmes were set up across County Durham starting in July 2010; all were due to complete on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. The venues were selected in the light of demographic data. The decision to run six week 12 GLH programmes was based on previous experience of engaging 'hard to reach' groups. Disengaged or 'hard to reach' people tend not to sign up to long programmes of 10 weeks or more for a number of reasons, around an initial reluctance to commit for a longer time. 'Hard to reach' people are more likely to take the opportunity to participate in shorter intervention programmes - it is then the task of the specialist tutors/support staff to

encourage re-engagement in learning by providing very interactive sessions, enrichment activities and then support progression onto longer programmes.

The project aims were to:

- promote community cohesion, social inclusion and cultural networks in the Durham area;
- provide access to information, advice and guidance for BME women with regard to volunteering opportunities, further learning and careers as well as information on accessibility of local services such as health centres, libraries and other community facilities.

The provision was delivered by specialist staff and adapted to particular themes such as leisure or family life and incorporated ESOL learning. Delivery themes ensured that the programme was motivational, helped build confidence and encouraged progression. Delivery of the programme was also flexible in terms of time and location, using community settings to provide easier access to learning for those who may feel socially excluded.

Activities were designed and tailored to meet the needs of the target groups more effectively, in the following ways:

- visiting speakers on health and community facilities;
- information, advice and guidance;
- sessions were designed to build language skills, self-esteem and confidence amongst participants further enabling them to take a full and active part in their community.

Delivery took place in local community settings providing easier access to learning, removing transport barriers, increasing social interaction and community cohesion. Flexible delivery was offered at times that are more convenient for the target groups i.e. during school hours and early evening.

The women accessing the project were aged 19 or over with low levels of English language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills. Each learner undertook an initial assessment, using pictorial questionnaires to address the participant's ability to speak little or no English language. Assessment identified individual needs and barriers to provide personalised support and develop a single realistic Individual Learning Programme.

Sessions included motivational, short, informal learning activities that engaged individuals in a meaningful and relevant way. Consultation with local community groups through the BME network identified popular activities and information from the pictorial questionnaires was used to identify themes for each programme

Childcare support was also available on each programme provided through the DCC mobile crèche.

All programme activity was designed to raise aspirations and to help participants progress to mainstream ESOL provision once the programmes had ended. The development of trust between project staff and learners was crucial to support a smooth transition into mainstream provision – tutors are able to make introductions and make transitions easier. The learners were very disengaged initially so managing retention was challenging. Learner discretionary funding is used to continue support. There is on-going monitoring to track progression.

The project will be sustained through the partnership structure which supports it. As well as the LA, FE Colleges sit on the steering group so are aware of need and of learner achievement.

## **Retention**

- a crèche was provided to support childcare - the women were able to leave their children with qualified child minders whilst accessing learning;
- transport was arranged for those women unable to access public transport or where public transport was unavailable;
- provision was available in local community settings to support improved social integration by encouraging access to community resources;

- development workers and community engagement workers accompanied some of the women to the classes in the first few sessions to provide additional support and confidence for these first time learners;
- class sizes were kept small to ensure the women had the support they needed from the specialist tutor;
- support workers were also available at some classes for learners requiring 1-to-1 support;
- on three programmes the times of the class were changed to suit the individuals attending;
- women only groups were available to address cultural barriers.

Most of the above were identified by the women as the kind of support they would need to access the course, via the initial screening and assessment process before the women started on the learning programme.

Positive feedback from the women participating on the programmes was obtained through visits by the development workers, during IAG sessions and by the Project Co-ordinator. Tutors also recorded written feedback on achievement and progression on ILP's.

Examples of feedback included:

- increased confidence in speaking English outside immediate family and friends;
- increased self-esteem in terms of 'being proud' of participating in learning;
- increased confidence in using public transport. One learner had never travelled by public transport since arriving in the UK. The skills taught on the course had provided the confidence to ask for the time of a bus into Durham, buy a ticket and engage in some conversation with other passengers on the way from Bishop Auckland to Durham City;

- increased awareness of community resources and health facilities in the local area;
- Increased confidence to ask questions on occasions such as parents' evenings, visits to the Doctor, health specialists etc. One learner felt able to seek out a dietician for advice for her child – normally would have only been able - with some difficulty - to arrange GP appointment;
- some skills in written English – this was reported by some learners but it was not a part of the overall aims of the project;
- awareness of learning opportunities available at Local Colleges and in the Community including mainstream ESOL provision.

### **Progression**

Following successful engagement and undertaking the pre-entry Level ESOL provision, to date the project has enabled 38 of the women to progress into mainstream Entry Level or above ESOL provision, or other learning. This number is set to rise on project completion.

The tutorial and IAG systems ensured participants were fully supported and informed about progression to further mainstream learning.

As part of the programme, individual discussions regarding progression opportunities were planned and IAG specialist advisors were available to visit the group (although this hasn't happened to date).

### **Partnership working**

In addition to DCC the following partners worked on the project to engage and deliver the programmes:

- FE Colleges : New College Durham, Bishop Auckland College, East Durham college;
- a range of voluntary/community groups had a role in the initial engagement of participants and also in providing local community venues for delivery.

These partner relationships were already established and partners were committed to being involved. The partnership put together an action plan which involved undertaking a mapping exercise to identify those experiencing social exclusion that are a priority for the project.

The project brought partners together to share best practice in identifying and engaging priority groups. Partners already had considerable experience of delivering a considerable volume of ESOL provision, engaging and delivering in the community a range of ESOL Skills for Life provision, from pre-entry Level to ESOL Level 2.

Although partnership working was established, there were still challenges from this collaboration. For example:

- Finding dates for the steering group meetings in busy schedules;
- Overcoming the issue of 'whose learners' the participants are.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- A range of voluntary/community groups to undertake the initial engagement of participants and provide local community venues for delivery;
- work with local agencies and community organisations to ensure all outreach and development workers disseminated information about the project opportunity including Parent Support Advisers and local community networks;
- Engagement activities including coffee mornings, drop-in engagement events at local libraries and other community venues, working with known & trusted community champions to influence and engage;
- linking with community engagement officers attached to community centres.

### *Retain*

- development workers and community engagement workers accompanied some women to the classes in the first few sessions to provide additional support and confidence for these first time learners;
- small class sizes to ensure women have the support they needed from the specialist tutor;
- additional support workers available at some classes for learners requiring 1-to-1 support;
- flexibility - on three programmes the times of the class were changed to suit the individuals attending;
- women-only groups available to address cultural barriers.

### *Progress*

- tutorial and IAG systems to ensure participants were fully supported and informed about progression to further mainstream learning;
- on programme, individual discussions regarding progression opportunities were planned.

### **Contact details**

Michelle Stone

Durham County Council Adult Learning Service

07747 486 697

[Michelle.Stone@durham.gov.uk](mailto:Michelle.Stone@durham.gov.uk)

## **Case Study 5: West Midlands - Birmingham Rathbone: ACCLR8**

### **Background**

Birmingham Rathbone is one of the five largest charities in Birmingham supporting around 1000 service users a year. Originally the Birmingham Elfrida Rathbone Society, Birmingham Rathbone was incorporated in 1985 to work locally in the Birmingham and Solihull area. Working from three sites in Birmingham in the Jewellery Quarter, Balsall Heath and Selly Oak, the charity's mission is to enable people aged 14 and above with mild to moderate learning difficulties and from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures to achieve their full potential and to participate within the local community. This includes young people and adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and mental health problems. Birmingham Rathbone's Learning, Skills and Employment Services provide opportunities in work-based learning, further education from pre-entry to Level 2 and supported employment programmes for learners and job-seekers. They also support service users to live independently within their communities.

In 2008, Birmingham Rathbone was successful in obtaining ESF funding through Birmingham and Solihull AGENCY for ACCLR8, a programme that works with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme began in February 2009 and finishes in March 2011. It aims to engage and support 16 to 18 year olds with activities and programmes to enable them to improve their employability, personal, social and basic skills. The young women on ACCLR8 are aged between 16 and 19 and from diverse backgrounds.

ACCLR8 is run from Birmingham Rathbone's Cromer Road Centre in Moseley. Young people on the ACCLR8 programme come into contact with a number of staff but the two Learning Programme Officers are key to the success of the programme. They work with the learners to enhance their social and interactive skills. Other staff include the ACCLR8 Programme Co-ordinator, Learning Support Officers who give the learners confidential and personal support, the Advice and Guidance Manager, Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) staff, as well as tutors and a part time in-house trainer.

## Training

ACCLR8 is a gateway programme for young people who are undecided about the education, employment and training pathway they want to engage with. It gives them the opportunity to try different types of work and see what they like. ACCLR8 is individually tailored to each young person who helps shape their own activity plan with an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) advisor. The IAG process has 3 components to assess a young person's 1) personal and social development needs which could include health and welfare 2) functional skills such as Mathematics, English and ICT and 3) vocational skills. The young person may never have worked or may lack the confidence to look for or find a job. Rathbone explore the vocational opportunities they and other providers can offer. The young person's Connexions Advisor or other supporting professional may attend with the learner at this interview to lend their support.

Working in partnership with referring agencies such as Birmingham Youth Service and Connexions, this plan of action may include additional support for those unable to travel independently; it may need to consider protection issues if they are of a certain minority group, support for disabilities, sign language support if they are hearing impaired or a speech therapist. A wide range of support can be built into the individual learning plan which is a tripartite agreement between the young person, the Youth Service and/or Connexions and Rathbone as provider/trainer.

ACCLR8 consists of a minimum of 12 to 30 hours of teaching a week over the course of approximately 15 weeks. Since January 2009, 366 young people have completed ACCLR8. Each individual can work towards qualifications during that process and start improving their skills in Mathematics, English and ICT. There are opportunities to engage with projects from partners, vocational tasters and to achieve milestone accreditation in food hygiene or manual handling, for example. Staff consider the gender imbalance, for example, the small proportion of young men on childcare, and try to encourage young people not to be stereotypical in their choices. A learning pathway for each individual is considered which can lead to Birmingham Rathbone's Foundation Learning programme.

The content of ACCLR8 is diverse and mixed-sex sessions include citizenship, jewellery making, drug and alcohol awareness, workplace skills such as manual handling, food safety and first aid, cooking for one, driving theory, personal presentation, tasters in horticulture and professional cookery training, budgeting, introduction to adult care and childcare training, job club and improving personal relationships: *“I wanted to go further in catering”* (Simah, 17). Activities are social and interactive such as go-karting, fruit-picking or music workshops.

During the lifetime of ACCLR8 a financial incentive has been the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) which is being replaced by discretionary funds. Birmingham Rathbone meets the travel costs of those who can travel independently. Financial incentives were offered to encourage young people to attend and to raise awareness of the services provided and learners who completed the course induction could earn up to £100 in achievement bonuses. Receiving financial support promoted a sense of independence amongst young women on the programme: *“You wouldn’t feel like an adult if you didn’t get paid something”* (Yvette, 17).

## **Barriers**

Poor educational attainment was seen as the key barrier for young women accessing employment and training; they may have dropped out of school, not completed their GCSEs, achieved low grades, are not confident enough to apply for a college place or are unaware of gateway programmes such as ACCLR8. Poor academic attainment may be a result of a caring responsibility or negative school experiences, such as bullying: *“being bullied really knocked my education down”* (Yvette, 17). Other barriers included caring for children, lack of confidence, mental health problems or skills such as timekeeping.

It was acknowledged that some women may face multiple barriers to employment and training but Birmingham Rathbone treats people on an individual basis and is able to offer support in relation to health, welfare and culture. Financial costs may prove to be a barrier to some young women. The women in the focus group all felt

that without EMA and travel assistance they would probably not be able to attend the training and they were aware of a number of young women on the training course who lived independently. *“The bus pass is really good...It would put me off [not having financial assistance]”* (Yvette, 17).

## **Recruitment**

The ACCLR8 training has been marketed Birmingham and Solihull wide but there is no specific agenda for targeting women. A whole range of marketing methods is employed to recruit young people including advertising on television and community radio, having materials in locations such as Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, GPs surgeries, youth centres and leisure centres. Rathbone contact all their networks including via email. They make sure that schools are aware of the services they can provide around transition. Awareness raising is also achieved through staff providing a presence at local sport and music events: *“The key thing is to engage directly with the young person face to face”* (Advice and Guidance Manager).

Outreach is a fundamental part of recruitment with Birmingham Rathbone mainly going into city areas. This may include home visits. They are a partner in Birmingham Carers UK and work with carers' organisations where they often find a specific female role in relation to caring and try to raise awareness of the extended guarantee whereby young people who have perhaps dropped out of school as a result of caring responsibilities can re-engage with education, employment and training to the age of 25. Working in partnership enables Birmingham Rathbone to discover where these young people may be hidden and letting them know that *“with the extended guarantee the door is open to them”* (Advice and Guidance Manager).

Recruitment success comes from working at a constituency level utilising the links Birmingham Rathbone have developed with other organisations, for example, with the Institute of Asian Businesses and UK Asian Women's Centre and other Asian community groups in order to reach out to under-represented groups especially in inner-city Birmingham. Following initial contact with new groups of women, meetings in communities are set up or events put on in partnership with Connexions. Birmingham Rathbone visit fetes, fairs, melas or festivals. Weekend work is vital such as visiting mosques or temples. There are lots of open days at the various

Birmingham Rathbone sites. All this is to help raise aspirations, awareness of provision and the wide range of support services they offer to young people. Word of mouth and recommendations from friends and family members also play a part: *“I heard about it from my cousin who had come here to do catering”* (Simah, 17).

## **Retention**

Young women are supported to stay the course by the Learning Programme Officers in the form of tutorials. Tutorials were seen as important by the young women in the focus group in helping maintain their motivation to attend. Members of the focus group spoke of the friendly and supportive environment at Rathbone. Rathbone also offers a range of other services to keep young people in the ACCLR8 programme, for example, through housing services which are important for young people who are estranged from their family or homeless.

Young women with children to look after on the ACCLR8 programme were eligible to apply for financial support for childcare from the Young People’s Learning Agency through the *Care to Learn* scheme for young parents under 20 years old. This was seen as a key driver for the IAG team to break down some of the barriers to employment and training for those with a responsibility of care and provide reassurance that Ofsted registered childcare could be found. Similarly, the part-time nature and flexibility of ACCLR8 was important, *“People need to have a stepping stone approach to the learning experience”*. The part time nature of the training was attractive to the young women in the focus group.

The ACCLR8 programme is key in helping boost the confidence of young women, for example, in speaking out in groups, socialising and as well as an opportunity to develop their English and Maths skills: *“School was okay until year 8 when I got bullied for years. It knocked my confidence but coming here has helped me build it up more and more”* (Rebecca, 17). The content of ACCLR8 and particularly the use of taster sessions which provides the women with opportunities to find out what interests them were attractive such as driving theory and ‘Dial C for Communication’: *“that lesson was really good because it was about how you get through to people on the ‘phone”* (Yvette, 17).

## **Progression**

In 2008/2009, 46 per cent of young people leaving the ACCLR8 programme progressed onto further education or training and in 2009/2010, 50.8 per cent of young people leaving the programme went onto further education or training with 368 learners gaining a qualification. The young women in the focus group were all quite clear about where they saw their future employment paths: Khadija wants to move on to a Level 3 qualification and a degree in mental health management, Simah hopes to study Mathematics at college and become an accountant, Yvette sees her career path in retail and Rebecca wants to work as a nursery nurse: *“If you want to get somewhere in life the only way you are going to do it is attending the course”* (Rebecca, 17).

At the initial IAG interview they attend, the advisor may draw up an additional action plan around transition and where the young person wants to go in the future. ACCLR8 is a gateway and has limitations up to a Level 2 qualification. It is crucial that Birmingham Rathbone staff know what partner providers can offer young adults, knowing where to refer and ensuring they have the pastoral support and care, *“We care about young people and that there is a transition review planned”*. Key to this is the recruitment of advisors who understand young people and their needs and are able to interact with them whilst remaining impartial and having the skills to signpost them to somewhere more appropriate. Learning Programme Officers support learners from interview to actual induction in areas outside of Birmingham Rathbone’s provision to ensure a smooth transition for the young person.

## **Partnership working**

Birmingham Rathbone work with an extensive number of partners some for as long as 10 to 20 years and they engage with new partners every week in the public and the private sector. The size of the organisation is not important but what they can offer to young people and whether they are interested in taking referrals is key. Partners are met with periodically through events mainly run by Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, Birmingham Youth Service and the local authority. They meet at school events, careers fairs and evenings and conventions. Partners include Connexions,

NHS, Home Office and Social Services and a range of national organisations such as The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge.

It is clear that networks and partners are very important to Birmingham Rathbone as is ensuring that they have a similar policy and focus. Partnership working means that Birmingham Rathbone are able to support young men and women if they need help or provision they themselves are unable to offer: *"For young people who are NEET to be rejected can be more damaging. Need to be confident with the young person, be upfront, we can take you so far but we know our limitations, but saying confidently we have links to providers, our network is quite vast and diverse, you'll get referred through and we'll support you in that transition"*.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- face to face communication overcomes barriers; staff talk to young women about their aspirations and help them recognise the skills that they already have;
- recognise some young women may need revisiting over and over - there isn't always a quick fix;
- multiple engagement strategies are used to recruit young women to learning provision;
- outreach and engagement work are not restricted to college hours and weekend work can be an important tool;
- recruitment success comes from working at a constituency level utilising links with other organisations in order to reach out to under-represented groups.

### *Retention*

- young women are supported to stay the course by the Learning Programme through tutorials;
- young women are supported by a range of other services, for example, housing services which are important for women who are estranged from their family;.

- part-time training is attractive to many young women;
- the content of ACCLR8 and the use of taster sessions providing the women with opportunities to find out what interests them were attractive.

### *Progress*

- staff support the young women in their transition to further learning and employment whether that is in-house or externally;
- partnership working is an essential component of smooth transitions;
- at the initial IAG interview, an action plan around transition and where the young person wants to go in the future is considered.

### **Contact details**

Paulette Dunkley

Birmingham Rathbone

0121 449 1011

[paulettedunkley@rathbone.co.uk](mailto:paulettedunkley@rathbone.co.uk)

## **Case Study 6: East of England – TCHC: Skills for Jobs**

### **Background**

TCHC (The Consultancy Home Counties) is a private training and brokerage operation set up in 2004 which covers the whole of the Eastern Region. Training is delivered in both rural areas and the cities in the region – some of these, for example, Bedford and Luton have large BME populations. TCHC has had a high volume of publicly funded training contracts and delivered Train to Gain across the East of England. It has a range of contracts with the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), the AGENCY and ESF. As a result very high numbers of individuals have accessed training and been helped to move into jobs.

The project received ESF funding through the usual bidding process but was successful because of the organisation's pedigree in the efficient delivery of European and other publicly funded projects, success which is founded on a strong relationship with employers in the region alongside a partnership-based training operation.

TCHC has a central staff team with advisers responsible for specific areas, for example, Norfolk and Suffolk, and delivery is currently through about 12 partner organisations across the region. The key staff involved in this project consist of:

- Director of Public Sector Funded Projects – overall responsibility for the delivery of the programme;
- Project Manager - responsible for the Skills for Jobs projects, working with the Marketing Officer in engaging with employers and for the development and maintenance of partnership with delivery organisations;
- Marketing Executive – responsible for marketing the project to employers and prospective trainees;

- Skills for Jobs Adviser – responsible for IAG, soft skills training with a caseload of trainees and liaison with partner organisations, employers and employer organisations in her region.

## Barriers

All the staff spoke of a range of significant barriers that were commonplace in the project. The issue of lack of confidence was ubiquitous. The women interviewed described having low self-esteem and self-worth; this was confirmed by the staff and attributed to a range of factors ranging from domestic violence to having been out of the labour market for some time. Poor educational experience was also a substantial barrier for many women. Staff mentioned the pernicious effects of several generations of unemployment within families and communities and the challenges this presented in getting trainees 'job ready'.

The partner organisation, Family Groups identified language barriers, poverty and the need for childcare as substantial barriers to mainstream provision. This was echoed by the trainees and other staff. Most reports were of multiple barriers to engagement and a resultant lack of motivation: *"I have to make myself do things – it's really hard sometimes"* (Barbara). Basic skills difficulties were identified and referrals to appropriate provision were made but this was not considered a common issue.

During discussion it became apparent that the many of the psychological barriers women experience in accessing training are overcome but some of the practical issues women face are problematic upon moving into work. Childcare was a barrier to training and, even if free, remained a problem in rural areas where it was not easily accessible. When moving into a work environment which may be much less flexible in responding to women's personal situations, having family responsibilities re-emerged as a barrier. As a result some women pursued voluntary work where they could negotiate their hours. TCHC spoke of the need to manage the expectations of employers taking on trainees in two ways: 1) developing realistic

expectations about the staff to be employed and what would need to be done to accommodate them and 2) overcoming prejudice about certain kinds of employee.

## Recruitment

There were two means of recruitment – through TCHC’s marketing executive and advisers and through the partner delivery organisations. There were two target groups - the client group for training and the employers required for successful employment.

Family Groups identified word of mouth, being well known in local communities and support groups as important recruitment tools. They also had a major success with a large advertisement in a local paper’s educational supplement which recruited a slightly different client group. Word of mouth from one course to another was also powerful. The women interviewed had heard about the course through a variety of means, advertisements in the paper, referrals from Jobcentre Plus and its Lone Parent Adviser and through word of mouth. Advertisements, life events or conversations triggered a determination to “*do something*”. The marketing officer also spoke of recruiting some women through social media such as ‘Twitter’ and the website ‘Mum’s the Blog<sup>31</sup>’ which supports women in business.

The availability of Matrix Standard IAG, free transport, childcare and training were all critical in encouraging potential learners to overcome their barriers.

TCHC has a significant relationship with local employers, for example, it managed a Leadership and Management programme in the East of England, helping co-ordinate a programme that worked with over 5,000 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. A campaign consisting of events, press releases, e-mails, use of social media and events was targeted at Chambers of Commerce and the TCHC’s network of employers. The focus was cutting recruitment costs by taking on a motivated candidate from the project. Apart from the work done by the Marketing Executive, all Advisers working for TCHC have employer relationship development and

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.mumstheblog.co.uk/>

maintenance as a part of their role. The need for local relevant information on job opportunities is vital to the success of placing trainees.

## **Training**

The target for the project, which has been achieved, was a throughput of 2000 women with a required success rate of 35 per cent in sustainable work (eight hours or more over 13 weeks) or volunteering with a 13 week follow up period. The programme ran from Autumn 2008 until December 2010 but was extended until the end of March 2011 with a further recruitment target.

The training requirement was a minimum of nine guided learning hours which had to include employability skills. However, for many trainees the input was much greater than this. For example, the childcare course offered by the partner Family Groups consisted of a 10 week, one day per week course with wrap-around support in job seeking, CV development and a Job Club at the end of the course. The training undertaken by the women interviewed varied from a single Health and Safety Course with a substantial advice session to a 12 hour per week, 23 weeks Accountancy course.

TCHC usually operated in the role of contractor of training therefore details of activities were determined by partner delivery organisations. The partner organisation interviewed was delivering childcare courses in a women-only environment. This provision included 1-to-1 support for the women concerned. The women (many of whom experienced multiple disadvantages) could also attend a programme of workshops where informal craft and associated activity took place.

TCHC as an organisation supports its partners by developing relationships with employers and employer bodies within the area. The training and guidance offered in this project were thus closely related to and focussed on real prospects of employment. Advisers focus on available vacancies with learners as much or more than learner aspirations on the basis that getting a job is easier when employed and the knowledge that for these learners jobs are the critical required outcome. Two examples illustrate this in quite different ways. The adviser spoke of a woman who had not worked for some time and had considerable childcare issues who had been

persuaded to consider a cleaning job. One of the women interviewed spoke of how she had initially thought of doing generic ICT training but had been persuaded that accountancy would give her better opportunities in the labour market and was already aware of vacancies requiring the qualification she was studying for.

Many of the women who engaged with the partner organisation were lone parents with low self-esteem, who were unemployed and reliant on benefits, living in poverty with low or no qualifications. A proportion of BME women had language issues.

## **Retention**

Both Family Groups and TCHC staff believed that the crèche, 1-to-1 support from staff and tailoring training to both the trainees needs and real, likely job opportunities were critical in keeping women on track. The women interviewed all found that getting non-judgmental support when things were difficult was important. Women identified peer support from the group they were training with as an important support mechanism. Trainees in this project felt the training was relevant to the important task of getting a job whether this was the course they took or the job-search skills they developed. For some, the courses they attended were transformative: *“I can’t explain how it’s changed my life – just this one course”* (Amanda).

Benefits for the women included increased confidence, a sense of direction and for many, the real outcome of a job; 20 of the 28 women on the course with Family Groups moved into jobs or volunteering. Staff mentioned a need to put in place some *“tough love”* in dealing with issues like personal appearance, appropriate clothing for interviews and poor time-keeping particularly where long-term joblessness was involved. Women expressed real appreciation for the help they had received in preparation for interviews and sorting out a proper CV. A number of women contrasted the support from TCHC in looking for a job that would suit them and their aspirations with that of Jobcentre Plus who were seen as pressing them to take any vacancy.

## **Partnership**

The key to TCHC's approach is partnership working. Although advisers have a caseload of clients, almost all the training is carried out by partners. The project was initially encouraged by the Skills Funding Agency to engage with the maximum number of partners and approximately 50 organisations were involved. Effectively, partnership in this context means the negotiation of a service level agreement and agreeing profiles for the delivery of outcomes. Over the period of the project some organisations have proved more effective than others in either supporting clients to successful outcomes or in completing the necessary paperwork to provide a transparent account of activity. At this stage (in an extension period of the project) about 12 organisations are involved.

The current partners are mainly voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that are able to look after clients and understand their issues and challenges but at the same time have the capacity to be aware of and meet the contractual requirements of the programme. The crucial benefit to TCHC of working with these organisations is their reach into communities and cultures. Overall, TCHC had found VCS organisations and some private training companies more flexible in responding to the needs of clients and TCHC's expected profiles than mainstream FE Colleges.

TCHC supported providers through quarterly provider forums where they were able to talk about case studies, discuss performance issues and share best practice.

TCHC was seen as a good partner by Family Groups even though it was a large operation dealing with a very small charity. Family Groups sometimes felt that the complex and changing paperwork requirements presented a barrier for learners which they had to mitigate and resolve.

## **Success factors**

TCHC with its very strong focus on employment and links with employers built through the services it provided suggested rather different success factors in engaging women to Family Groups. This illustrates the way different approaches are able to complement each other in meeting need. TCHC were very articulate about

how employers are targeted. Work has taken place with TCHC Advisers to emphasise that their role is not simply to build relationships with the client group but to make links and relationships with employers that enable them to be clear about what local work opportunities are available and to encourage employers to recruit trainees.

### *Recruitment*

- convincing employers of the benefits of taking on trainees (low or no recruitment costs, motivated and keen employees);
- supporting local training providers and valuing their particular skills in working with women experiencing multiple disadvantage and understanding the barriers disadvantaged learners can face;
- using good, experienced practitioners with excellent local knowledge;
- high proportion of female staff (80 per cent).

### *Retention*

- supporting both employees and employers;
- strong wrap-around learner support –responding to learners’ issues and challenges;
- providing programmes that motivate women and raise their confidence - building self-esteem within a framework that is clear about the expectations of employers as well as understanding the issues of the client group;
- building a substantial network of employers and running a scheme alongside business support contacts to maximise opportunity for synergy;
- running additional activities such as craft workshops to provide an additional focus for the women involved.

### *Progress*

- follow up in terms of a Job Club. At the end of the course many of the women had not obtained work. A Job Club supported them as they applied for jobs and were interviewed for posts;

- looking closely at local job opportunities and gearing guidance on training towards real, available jobs resulting in a high success rate in placing women in jobs;
- spending real time and energy on employment skills and building a good CV.

### **Contact details**

TCHC

Director of Public Sector Services

[Mel.parkes@tchc.net](mailto:Mel.parkes@tchc.net)

Family Groups

Derry Dyers

01234 316801

[admin@familygroups.co.uk](mailto:admin@familygroups.co.uk)

## Case Study 7: Yorkshire and Humber - Kirklees Skills for Jobs

### Background

Kirklees Metropolitan Council in West Yorkshire successfully secured funding for Skills for Jobs from the European Social Fund. Kirklees, formed in 1974, has a population of approximately 400,000 and consists of old mill towns and a few country villages. Its administrative centre is Huddersfield. The council developed a commissioning round upon being awarded the funding and whilst looking at the gaps in provision in Kirklees, they were not overly prescriptive around activities. Over the course of 3 rounds of commissioning in the district a number of successful projects have taken place. Local organisations which came out with the highest scoring were appointed. This case study focuses on two of those projects based at Kirklees Community Campus (KCC) and the Disabled People's Electronic Village Hall (DP-EVH). KCC came on board with the second round of commissioning in June 2009 and DP-EVH in October 2009. Both were extended in 2011.

KCC is an independent, local charity with centres in Paddock and Batley. They work across the district from a variety of venues and in an outreach capacity. KCC aim to improve the life choices of Kirklees residents, particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas.

DP-EVH is also a non-profit making, limited company registered as a charity working predominantly with disabled and disadvantaged people in the Dewsbury and Kirklees locality since 1994. The organisational mission statement reads *"The DP-EVH exists to provide top quality training in computer use and related careers for disabled and disadvantaged people in order to improve their lifestyles, education and employment prospects"*. DP-EVH is run by a board of directors elected from the membership. Members have to be disabled to become directors. DP-EVH is based in a suite of rooms designed for disability access.

## **Barriers**

Barriers to learning and employment identified by DP-EVH include caring responsibilities, mental health problems and long-term unemployment. Lack of childcare provision/facilities in the district has deterred women from attending provision rather than the cost of childcare. Women who are lone parents lack support from a partner to learn or work.

The combination of mental health issues and long-term unemployment were seen as the greatest combined barriers amongst the women attending DP-EVH. It was felt that this created fear - that if anything goes wrong it is attributable to mental health rather than an individual merely making a mistake. Subsequently women lose their confidence. Cultural considerations may mean some women are unable to participate in learning and in some instances the separation of men and women has had to take place.

## **Training**

DP-EVH delivers their programme of activities with 2 partners: Changeworks Consulting Ltd who mainly engages with women referred by Jobcentre Plus and the Indian Muslim Welfare Society (IMWS). Formed in 1957, the IMWS is a voluntary organisation of Muslims in North Kirklees who develop resources for community capacity building. Their Skills for Jobs programme aims to motivate and engage individuals back into learning and support learners to progress into further learning, training, voluntary work or employment. The range of learning options includes Skills for Life and vocational training, for example, Business Administration, Childcare, IT, First Aid, Hygiene, fashion and soft furnishings, cake decorating and employability skills.

Of the 32 current active learners on their ESF funded *Skills for Life* provision, the average age of the women is 29. Of this cohort, 7 are lone parents and 11 women are disabled including learning difficulties, 4 have mental health issues and 2 have mobility issues. Nine women are from ethnic minorities. Two of the women are known victims of domestic violence. Eight women withdrew from the course all of

whom had a disability; most had mental health issues and had been unemployed for more than 3 years.

KCC work with 5 other partner centres across North and South Kirklees in their Skills for Jobs provision to help individuals progress into further learning and employment. Their provision is vocational IT targeted at people with low or no qualifications who are not in contact with or a new customer of Jobcentre Plus. Support includes a range of accredited and non-accredited training including Customer Service Skills, mentoring and 1:1 support, careers advice and guidance, Introductory and Office IT and Skills for Life assessments (where appropriate).

A high proportion of the women learners with KCC are from ethnic minorities possibly due to the location of the centres and there was a noted rise in the number of women attending the project at the height of the recession in 2010. KCC's ESOL provision at the moment is mainly undertaken by women; groups are women-only and men-only groups.

Both KCC and DP-EVH work closely together in referring learners to each other's provision and not just as part of the Skills for Jobs funding.

## **Recruitment**

KCC have not made any specific effort to attract women over men to their Skills for Jobs activities and utilise generic marketing materials placed in partner's centres, for example. They strongly rely on learning mentors (all of whom are women) and community workers within their centres to help engage local people who have often had prior contact with their local community centre. Their approach is one of building and drawing upon existing, established relationships. They also feel that the level of provision – Level 1 – plays a key role in attracting learners as well as the type of provision. In their experience, men and women tend to be more attracted to gender specific type courses e.g. men to building; women to cake decorating.

DP-EVH have found over the years that word of mouth is a fundamental recruitment tool. DP-EVH and its staff are community based so they are well known locally with a good, longstanding reputation. They suggest people feel comfortable in their

environment in a way that they would not feel about accessing a college environment. They use their networks and relationships with local partners who know their communities. Similarly, community mentors know who people are and who is looking for what locally.

Working with the IMWS as part of Skills for Jobs is important in drawing upon their experience of engaging women from ethnic minority communities in Kirklees through community mentors. DP-EVH have found that some of the ethnic minority women are accessing provision as a means of social interaction as well as for educational reasons. Ruzwana, for example, has not undertaken any paid employment but has been at home raising children. She attends DP-EVH's non-accredited programme on a Friday afternoon and enjoys the opportunity to *“get out of the house and do things for yourself”*. She has persuaded some friends *“to come down here and see if you like it. You are welcome to join in. [The staff] help and support you on the computers”*.

DP-EVH has around 80 voluntary workers and they are in the process of putting some of them through the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) training. This would allow men and women to learn from home whilst being supported by a mentor in the community to meet with until they feel strong enough to attend a learning centre. They acknowledge that a lot of people find coming through the doors of locations (even those as welcoming as DP-EVH) a barrier and so they will be taking the learning to them.

## **Retention**

Women learners stay the course at KCC and DP-EVH because of the flexibility of the provision which has fed down from the fund manager to partners. At DP-EVH staff understand women have caring responsibilities and women with disabilities and mental health problems often have hospital appointments to attend or are ill and they keep their places on the programme available. Personal contact with the learners is important. Staff try to be approachable and welcoming: *“Nice here. Get to know the people”* (Ruzwana). At DP-EVH, 80 per cent of staff are prior students which makes them more understanding of learners. At KCC, the emphasis on mentoring is helpful in seeing women progress through the programme.

Knowing the women and providing them with one-to-one support plays a part in ensuring they stay. Having professional staff who deliver quality teaching and training, that are trained and aware of problems so that they can signpost learners to the appropriate organisations is important. Staff development is therefore key. Both Skills for Jobs projects at KCC and DP-EVH provided assistance with childcare and participant travel costs.

The small group sizes at DP-EVH also appear important in providing high levels of support to women learners: Christina, for example, was referred from Changeworks to DP-EVH in 2010. She attends a numeracy class on a Friday which is a roll-on, roll-off programme with a small number of attendees. Stephanie is currently attending Literacy (Level 1) in a group of four to five learners and Ruzwana's group has two volunteers supporting the tutor. They all felt this contributed to developing their confidence, independence and socialisation skills. They are all in contact with staff from DP-EVH who frequently telephone them at home.

## **Progression**

KCC support women to move on internally by providing activities and qualifications they can access in-house. They also utilise their longstanding relationship with the local college, the WEA and partner centres to move women on particularly to the Access course in HE and to health and social care. KCC run access sessions weekly which are open to everyone. They have observed that women and men's expectations of Skills for Jobs provision can be different with women often taking more of a long term view of moving back into employment whilst men expect immediate results.

At DP-EVH by considering the various funding streams they are drawing on, funding which allows internal progression is looked at first for their low- level learners. A lot of progression is internal. Some of the women do go into employment, to other organisations or to college or university. Some of the women, particularly those recruited through the IMWS, want to set up their own businesses. The DP-EVH offers Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) to all its students. Each class is

visited (at least once) by a representative from Connexions to discuss their services and to assist with progression to additional courses of interest that the DP-EVH do not deliver.

Prior to Skills for Jobs, most of KCCs and DP-EVHs courses were of short duration. This funding has enabled them to have a longer engagement with learners, up to a year in some cases. Working with the learner over a relatively long period of time not only gives the learner longer to develop their confidence and self-reliance but longer for staff to signpost and refer women. Informal support for the women frequently continues beyond the life of the courses: "*We make it so they can come back to us*". Christina, Ruzwana and Stephanie were all happy to consider undertaking more courses at DP-EVH.

### **Partnership working**

In the early days of KCC, staff decided that the partnership approach was the most effective for the learner. They work with the local authority and other organisations similar to themselves to try to establish a referral system. The funding for Skills for Jobs has helped sharpen this approach and create new partnerships.

DP-EVH had previously encountered difficulties in engaging men and women from ethnic minorities. They realised that the stigma of disability meant that they needed partners who worked with ethnic minorities and who understood the barriers to engagement. Working with IMWS and Changeworks has worked really well. For example, Changeworks provides food hygiene and employability courses; IMWS provides cake decorating and knowledge of the ethnic minority women in Kirklees whilst DP-EVH provides IT programmes and experience of supporting adults with disabilities.

Kirklees Council stipulates that projects funded by Skills for Jobs attend local authority worklessness groups which were set up to help achieve local area agreements targets. This has opened doors to more partners including a local Children's Centre - Shaw Cross, for example. The wide remit of groups helps partners with recruitment and knowledge sharing. The local authority adult learning network is another network within which KCC and DP-EVH have developed useful

partnerships, for example, with Lifeline Kirklees - alcohol and drug services, Kirklees Asian Black Women's Welfare Association and other specialist providers such as Worklink, an Employment Service set up by Kirklees Council to support anybody with a disability or long term illness.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- draw on partners' strengths for recruitment: work in partnership with an organisation trusted by and known to local women from ethnic minority groups;
- word of mouth is an important recruitment tool. Women respond well to an organisation which is well known locally with a longstanding reputation;
- staff who are community based and prior learners themselves can be effective at engaging women;
- learning mentors, community mentors and community workers can engage local women, building upon existing relationships in the community.

### *Retention*

- flexibility – keeping open places for women who have caring responsibilities and understanding that women with disabilities and mental health problems often have appointments to attend;
- personal contact with the learners is important such as staff who telephone learners at home to encourage them to attend;
- having professional staff who are aware of learners' problems and are able to signpost learners to appropriate organisations.

### *Progress*

- providing opportunities for women to move on internally;
- providing IAG to assist with progression to additional courses of interest elsewhere;

- utilising relationships with other learning providers to enable women to move on to different provision;
- providing opportunities for women to volunteer and support others helps build confidence and skills for employment.

### **Contact details**

Kirklees Council

01484 414829

[alison.bruton@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:alison.bruton@kirklees.gov.uk)

Kirklees Community Campus

01484 431400

<http://www.kirkleescommunitycampus.blogspot.com/>

The Disabled People's Electronic Village Hall

01924 453502

<http://www.dp-evh.org.uk/>

## **Case Study 8: North West - The Women's Organisation: Be Enterprising**

### **Background**

The project is delivered by The Women's Organisation (formerly Train 2000), a social enterprise based in the centre of Liverpool. TheWO was founded in 1996 and exists to improve the economic position of women. In particular, it aims to support women into self-employment. However, it operates on the principle that it 'never simply turns a woman away', so women who do not wish to become self-employed, or who need support with training, learning or other issues that lie beyond the remit of TheWO, are signposted or referred to appropriate alternative provision.

Empowering women through enterprise is central to TheWO's mission, in line with which it seeks to provide its services in ways which reflect the constraints of women's lives. The organisation has a strong track record on engaging women from the diverse communities in the city.

TheWO is funded from a range of sources to provide enterprise training and support for women across Merseyside. Its provision includes: IAG; personal development; business planning, one-to-one business adviser support, workshops on a range of self-employment topics such as tax, marketing and PR; supporting women in disadvantaged areas of the city to set up and run women's circles to improve their local community; and advice on turning a hobby into a source of income. ESF funding for the Be Enterprising project has enabled the extension and development of its existing model in a number of ways:

- Outreach engagement and provision;
- More intensive personal development and business planning courses.

The project was funded from 2007 to 2009. Subsequently it received extension funding to March 2011. A project manager (TheWO training manager), tutors and outreach staff make up the project team.

A total of 1092 women have been engaged during the lifetime of the programme.

## Barriers

Women on the project come from a diverse range of backgrounds, in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, previous educational attainment, employment experience, health and disability status and domestic circumstances. Of the 1092 women engaged during the programme, 218 were from BME backgrounds, 149 had a disability, 330 were lone parents and 800 were aged between 25 and 49 years. While the six women in the focus group were all White native English speakers with relatively high levels of education and previous employment experience, the project manager stressed that they did not reflect the demographic and educational breadth of participants. Both they and project staff were aware of and sensitive to the range of barriers that were experienced by themselves and other participants.

The research identified a range of challenges experienced by women joining the project:

### *Attitudinal barriers*

**Poor mental health, low self-esteem and low motivation** Some women who have joined the project, including two focus group participants, have a history of mental health difficulties such as depression which inhibited their ability to progress in education or employment. For many, the root of these difficulties lies in abusive domestic situations from childhood or earlier adulthood. Although by the time they join the project women tend to be 'recovering' from mental illness, they carry a deeply engrained perception of themselves as being 'no good' and having only a very limited range of options in life, which leads to a lack of motivation and acts as a barrier to participation. The project manager from TheWO identified this as an issue strongly linked to gender, with women as a group being conditioned from an early age to have a fragile sense of self-worth, which is reinforced through domestic, education and employment experience into adult life.

**Lack of confidence in their ability to succeed** For some women, this means a lack of confidence about taking the step from employment to self-employment, while for others it means a lack of confidence about pursuing training and a successful career of any kind. One woman in the focus group described how, having left her

university course early due to depression, “*I did various dead-end jobs and couldn’t see a way out of that*”. Many women come to the project haunted by poor experiences of previous education.

**Cultural perceptions about the women and work** The project works with many women from BME communities which have traditionally been resistant to women undertaking work outside the home. Several participants were taken from school at the age of eleven, were lost to the education system, and subsequently had little contact with the wider world outside their family and immediate community. Some families had been unsupportive and reinforced the women’s low self-esteem and lack of confidence around education and employment by telling them that, ‘you can’t do that.’ Some women had been socialised to have limited expectations of themselves.

#### *Practical barriers*

**Language** The project has attracted women from diverse backgrounds including many who do not have English as a first language and some who have either limited or no English.

**Childcare** The lack of, or cost of, high quality and conveniently located childcare prevents women who are mothers from participating in training or employment.

**Financial** The cost of travelling to and attending training puts it beyond the reach of many women, especially those on low incomes.

**Physical location** Where training or work is offered can affect women’s ability to participate. Lack of confidence, family commitments and transport issues mean that some women will not be able to access training or employment beyond the geographical area where they live.

The most significant barrier to women’s participation in training identified by the project manager is their poor self-esteem and lack of confidence. This is exacerbated for some women by mental ill health and cultural factors. However, she stressed that many of the women who access the project and the wider services offered by TheWO experience multiple barriers to training, and there is often a

complex combination of attitudinal and practical barriers that needs to be addressed. Lack of childcare can be a 'deal breaker' for women with children, and the focus group participants unanimously identified this as the main barrier in their experience.

An illustration of how different factors might interact was given. Women from BME communities that are culturally resistant to women's employment outside the home are unlikely to be able to participate in training that is not delivered in a local venue with on-site childcare.

## **Recruitment**

TheWO uses a range of recruitment approaches to attract women to the project.

**Outreach staff** The work of the outreach staff employed as part of the project is the single most successful method of recruitment. Outreach staff engage with women in local settings such as community centres, Children's Centres, school gates, colleges, JET centres and sports centres, as well as holding stalls at local job fairs, road shows and events. In some cases, activities for children (e.g. face painting) are run as part of the initial outreach, to attract women who are with their families and keep the children occupied while the outreach worker spoke to the mothers. The project outreach worker stressed the importance of *"going to where the women are"* and engaging with them in ways that are comfortable to them: *"Sometimes that means you have to get down on your hands and knees on the mat where they're playing with their children to talk to them, because it's not good saying, 'come and sit over here,' when they're in the middle of playing with their children"*.

**Word of mouth** TheWO has a good local reputation as the place for women to go for advice and support on self-employment. Its work is covered in local press, and it has a high profile. Three of the women in the group *"just knew"* that it was the right place to start if they wanted to become self-employed, and two others found out about it from friends. The project manager stated that this is one of their most powerful marketing and recruitment tool.

**Work with engagement partners** The project is able to build on TheWO's relationships with other local service providers to establish referral routes into the project. Engagement partners include: Business Link, Knowsley Council, Jobcentre Plus and Stepclever. Business Link in particular is an active referral agency, and has been one of the key routes through which women enter the project.

**Marketing and publicity** The project has been advertised in the free local press (which reaches most households across Merseyside), on local radio, by leaflets and on TheWO's website. The free press advertisement and Internet attracted a steady flow of participants.

The recruitment process and initial IAG are designed to support the needs and interests of individual women. However, the following diagram shows the general client journey onto the project:



Some business advisers are also outreach workers / engagement officers, which means that clients can work with the same member of staff during this initial engagement and assessment phase. Where the provision offered by the project is not appropriate for the client, they will be either referred to other TheWO provision (for example, *Turning your hobby into an income*) or alternative IAG or training outside the organisation.

The project has been able not only to reach but to exceed its engagement targets because it addresses both attitudinal and practical barriers that women face. A central feature of TheWO's approach is that the engagement activity and the training itself are delivered in ways which actively respond to the needs of women in different circumstances. In particular, outreach workers were able to engage with women from communities who, for cultural reasons, because of their lack of confidence or

English language skills, or because of childcare commitments, would have been unlikely to venture outside their local area and seek out provision. The engagement officers working in these areas speak a range of community languages, and recruitment materials are produced in community languages. The engagement officer interviewed said that she has sought to make herself known in the community and build trust in the project which both encourages women to engage and helps to overcome resistance from their families and the wider community.

When the project begins working in a new area, it carries out research in the community to identify what women's training needs are, and what specific approaches will best enable them to participate. These ideas are taken back to the central team at TheWO, who refine the generic course so that it reflects what will engage women in that context.

The initial assessment process is central to overcoming women's lack of confidence and sense of self-worth. The adviser works with the client to identify her existing skills, and help her to recognise and value what she can do. This may mean, for example, enabling women to recognise the skills that they have gained through raising a family, running a home or helping out in their place of worship. Enabling women to value what they know is key to motivating them to move forward: *"They come to us thinking that they're rubbish and saying, 'I don't know how to do anything.' We say to them, well what have you been doing? Bringing up your children, getting them to school on time? You have some skills around punctuality, timekeeping then"* (Engagement Worker).

Initial assessment and the project courses are delivered in trusted community venues close to where the women live. Training is delivered at times and at locations that fit in with women's other commitments, for example, the project was delivered to a group of mothers in the school attended by their children, during school hours.

Classes can be arranged to meet the needs of specific groups of women who face problems around confidence and self-esteem. The course has been delivered to a group of Muslim women friends, for example, although this is not the norm and groups are usually very diverse.

Women are encouraged to disclose disability and accessibility needs at the point of registration, so that these can be addressed. Translated materials, interpretation (including BSL) and non-English language teaching are available.

Crèche facilities are provided free of charge, on site and travel expenses are paid.

The outreach worker said that the specific focus of this programme – enterprise training for women – is an important factor in explaining why it is able to attract and retain women from certain BME communities. Home-based self-employment presents a feasible employment option for women whose culture is not supportive of women's work outside the home. It is a way for women to become economically active with which both they and their families can feel comfortable.

## **Training**

The training is delivered in groups of 10 to 12 women. It is delivered at TheWO's main office, or in outreach settings including schools, community centres and Children's Centres. TheWO staff identify the diversity of their training groups as one of the programme's distinctive features. Typically, a group will include at least two women for whom English is not their native language. Where English language needs are identified, translated materials and interpreters are provided to enable women to participate in the programme, and on a number of occasions non-English language training sessions have been delivered. Women are also signposted to ESOL provision.

The programme aims to promote self-employment as a career path for women and equip them with the skills, knowledge and understanding to start up their own business. In particular, the programme uses an outreach approach to engagement and training with the aim of reaching women who are unemployed and experience multiple disadvantages in the labour market, and for whom self-employment could provide a means of overcoming that disadvantage.

Once their suitability for the training has been identified, women are enrolled either onto the personal development course and then the business planning course or straight onto the business planning course, depending on their starting point. The courses consist of the following elements:

<i>Personal development</i>	<i>Business planning</i>
Session 1: Introduction, learning styles, positivity	Session 1: Mission statement
Session 2: Communication – assertiveness	Session 2: Business aims and objectives
Session 3: Communication – assertiveness, barriers	Session 3: SWOT analysis
Session 4: Skills audit, personal development, SMART	Session 4: Business structures
Session 5: CV, application forms, interview skills	Session 5: Market research

The business planning element was described by the project manager as a 'business planning toolkit', which gives women the skills they need to start a business. However, the course also aims to provide recruits with the skills to assess both whether self-employment is right for them and whether the initial business idea they bring to the programme is, in fact, viable. The project manager stressed that

some women start out with unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve in a short time, and part of TheWO's role is to support them to realise when they need *"to go back to the drawing board"*.

Some parts of the training are delivered by TheWO trainers, and others by specialist staff (e.g. HMRC, a journalist to support the marketing element). Where external staff are brought in, they are carefully selected to ensure that they will work in a way that is consistent with the values and aims of TheWO.

The project manager/tutor stressed that women's learning is facilitated, rather than their being 'taught'. Each participant is supported to relate the programme to her own needs and aspirations and to take control of her own learning. In this way, the principle of empowering women is reinforced through the learning process.

## **Retention**

Retention rates are high on the programme. The most significant reason identified for the programme's high retention rate was the supportive group environment created by TheWO. In the early stages of the course, the group is encouraged to 'bond' and form a strong peer support network, and to share telephone numbers and email addresses.

Women on the programme stressed that the specific purpose of the training helps to build a strong group dynamic. Learners share both a desire to become self-employed and a lack of knowledge about how to achieve this. *"We're all in the same boat"* was a comment repeated by several women in the focus group. This common sense of purpose and learning with a like-minded group can be powerfully experienced, especially for women for whom setting up in business is a long-held dream, and maybe one that they have not been confident about sharing with family and friends. The group provides a safe space in which they could talk openly about their dreams and aspirations, share ideas and feedback, and draw support from one another. Women in the focus group agreed that there is a strong sense of belonging to and responsibility for the group: *"Once you've signed up as part of the group you wouldn't want to let the group down. The group would feel different if someone wasn't there. You'd all notice"*.

In addition, women on the programme are encouraged to use it as a source of further networking to support their future business development, e.g. by sharing clients and expertise.

Alongside the group training, women on the programme can also access one-to-one support from their personal tutor/business adviser at any time. This support is on-going, and is available to women for as long as they need it and does not cease after the end of the training. One to one business support for women is TheWO's core business. Although it is linked to the ESF programme it is not an integral part of it, but women on the programme valued it highly as both a key factor in helping them to participate successfully in the course, and in enabling them subsequently to take forward their business ideas.

Women who took part in the focus group did not generally attribute the success of the programme to the fact that the groups are women-only. They felt that the personalities in the group, the skills and professionalism of TheWO staff and the participants' shared aspiration to become self-employed were all more important for making the group 'work' and supporting them to succeed. One participant said that the all-female environment might have made it easier to describe her business idea (acupuncture). Nevertheless, they identified a number of Muslim women in their groups who would not have been able to participate had the group been mixed.

The project manager was more inclined to highlight the benefits that arose from women-only groups, in the sense that this approach reflects the wider ethos and values of TheWO. Creating a safe and empowering learning environment for women is central to what TheWO aims to do, and this is inseparable from the fact that it works exclusively with women. She also emphasised that a significant number of women on the programme have mental health problems that stem from their having been in abusive relationships with men, and are not confident or comfortable in male environments. TheWO does use some male tutors but this has not created any problems.

## **Progression**

The project aims to support women to become self-employed.

TheWO collect case studies of individual women's stories to illustrate the success of the project.

The six women in the focus group were at various stages of establishing their own enterprises. They were:

- a hairdresser who had many years' experience as an employee in a salon and now has her own business;
- a woman who worked in social care and was inspired to re-train as an acupuncturist after the treatment helped her recovery from illness, and who is in the process of gaining the qualifications to practice independently;
- a trainer who has set up on her own and who now delivers some training for The WO;
- a former software engineer who re-trained as a plasterer after being made redundant and who now runs a plastering company employing ten people;
- an events organiser and craft practitioner who together have established a business running craft-based events.

## **Partnership working**

The programme works with a range of partners, mostly through established partnerships. TheWO has had to work particularly hard at establishing its relationship with Jobcentre Plus, and is delivering on-going awareness raising training on self-employment for women to local JCP staff. Business Link has been the most fruitful partnership, due to its specific focus on supporting self-employment.

Close links have been developed by TheWO with a wide range of other service providers such as JCP; Liverpool Jobs, Enterprise and Training (JET) Service; Children's Centres; adult learning centres; Citizens' Advice Bureau; and disability

organisations to facilitate the process of referring women both into and from its provision.

The key delivery partner is HMRC, which provides specialist training on tax matters.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- initial focus group research in communities, to identify what specific needs women have and how these can be met;
- outreach engagement and training is delivered in community locations with which women are already familiar and where they are comfortable;
- trust in the project is built up in communities so that families are comfortable with women's participation;
- low confidence and self-esteem are tackled through initial contact, assessment, personal development, and an approach to training delivery which actively seeks to foster empowerment;
- language barriers are addressed to both engagement and participation;
- strong partnerships to aid referral.

### *Retention*

- a flexible approach is adopted, in which the locations and timings of training sessions are designed in consultation with women and reflect their needs;
- childcare is provided in ways that are consistent with women's culture and values;
- a strong peer support structure is established which aids retention;
- the 'niche' focus of the programme on enterprise training means that participants share a common goal.

## *Progress*

- support from a personal tutor/business adviser is on-going and is available to women for as long as they need it.

## **Contact details**

Bernie Cox

Training Co-ordinator

The Women's Organisation

0151 236 6601

[berniecox@thewo.org.uk](mailto:berniecox@thewo.org.uk)

## **Case Study 9: London - StreetVibes: SO2**

### **Background**

StreetVibes is a VCS not-for-profit organisation which began in 2004 when the Director opened up his studio for young people in Lewisham. It has developed organically from receiving 'spot' funding from local authorities as part of their youth work programmes to receiving more secure long-term funding and contracts from local authority and other government sources in recognition of the organisation's ability to connect with and support hard-to-reach young people. The organisation has been delivering accredited courses in creative subjects including BTEC Creative Media for the past three years. The Centre has a Special Educational Needs (SEN) course running one day per week for a few full-time learners and approximately 20 part-time learners who attend for two days per week.

StreetVibes works in over six London Boroughs. The Centre at Eltham where SO2 was based employs 10 full-time and one part-time member of staff and up to 10 volunteers. The staff profile includes teachers, trainers, teaching assistants and administrative support.

The project received ESF funding through a direct contract from the Skills Funding Agency. The provider had previous successes in ESF projects with this client group. Funding was received for courses over the period 2008 to August 2010 with SO2 being an extension project which ran from August 2010 to February 2011 including the follow-up elements of the programme. The staff members directly involved with the programme were:

- the Partnerships Manager whose role involves contract management and compliance bidding and tenders;
- the Project Manager responsible for marketing and recruitment, relationships with partner organisations and day-to-day running of the project;
- IAG workers responsible for coaching and mentoring the young people engaged in the project, liaison with training organisations and/or employers and follow up.

## **Barriers**

Staff reported that many of the women experienced a range of barriers in both engaging with the programme and moving on within it. Many of those involved were still dependent on their parents and levels of parental support for the young people varied. Parental expectations and aspirations were sometimes in contradiction with the aspirations of the young people themselves.

Lack of money was a big problem for some of the young women; the disappearance of EMA (closed to new applicants in England from January 2011) had a significant effect in increasing the barriers for this group – particularly as the economic climate has meant a reduction in the number of part-time jobs available. Some young people had dropped out after a year at College because they could no longer afford to participate once EMA funding ceased. Parents were either unable or unwilling to support their children to allow completion of the course and young people without part-time jobs could see no way to meet their daily costs whilst at College. Some of the young people were unwilling to sign on with Jobcentre Plus because of the stigma attached to signing on which they felt branded them as failures.

There were issues with travel for the young women related to where provision was taking place with some unwilling to travel to certain areas because of associations with gang culture. Although this barrier was more severe for young men, the women experienced it too, especially if they were in a relationship where it was an issue.

Project staff found that young women were more motivated to join the programme than young men. However, there were very significant psychological barriers in place which related to what could be studied initially as well as issues of confidence and peer pressure. Initially the young women's aspirations tended to be very limited and focused almost entirely on childcare or health and beauty where it was believed there were both jobs and opportunities for running one's own business.

Many young people were concerned about debt and aspirations to move into Higher Education had been replaced by a desire to get a job and earn money. For some young women, having a partner who was on benefits or not in education, employment or training could undermine their aspirations and they may be pressured to leave education. Where Apprenticeships were offered by colleges, the lack of negotiated work placements meant young people themselves had to find a willing employer for this purpose.

For a minority of young women who were lone parents there were specific barriers around housing and childcare. Young mothers tended to ricochet from living independently (possibly in hostels) to returning to their mother's home and could be allocated housing far from where training provision was made, meaning continued engagement was difficult. These women were often reliant on benefits. Their identity as mothers was paramount to them and even if offered free childcare they would often not find it acceptable to take advantage of it. Staff felt that the combination of childcare issues with the stress and tiredness that caring for young children brings added to de-motivation. They observed that family cultures and peer group attitudes seemed to suggest to these young mothers that they could do nothing for themselves until their children were at school.

For these young women the multiple barriers of parental culture and peer group pressure, lack of funding and a perception that they would not be able to succeed in the current economic climate meant that the project had to find positive strategies to engage with these issues. All the staff interviewed felt that there needed to be longer and more in-depth engagement with the young women to effect a real change in their expectations and behaviours.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment took place on a pattern aligned with Jobcentre Plus because of the geographical spread of the project. The key objective was to recruit at places where the young people would have to go in the course of their lives as they were unlikely to be motivated to seek out provision. The Connexions Centre at Woolwich was a key recruitment site. It was vital in this process for StreetVibes staff to develop a relationship with the NEET Worker or the 16 – 24 team as these staff would know

the young people who would benefit most from referral. These teams could also provide advice on benefits since the fear of losing benefits was an important barrier to participation, where benefits were being received by the young people or their families. In all cases, a physical presence was necessary: *“actually being sat there made the difference”*.

The project did engage in some on the street recruitment – this was successful in stimulating interest but the conversion rate to actual engagement was low. It was felt that this form of recruitment needed more time than funding would allow. Word of mouth from young people to their peers was a strong component of this project. The music studio StreetVibes was an added attraction to some young people.

The project used fliers distributed through partner organisations such as young women’s hostels but these were only really effective if backed up by personal contact. Recruitment was labour intensive and needed in depth knowledge of the patterns of life of the target group.

## **Training**

The target group for this project was 16 – 19 year olds who were not in education, employment or training. The project was mixed sex and about 24 of those engaged were women. Provision included job-search skills, guidance and advice, coaching and mentoring. A holistic approach was used which also included money management, presentation skills and confidence building. Nine guided learning hours per participant were allowed for this activity and follow up in either educational provision or employment.

There were very specific targets for the 60 young people recruited:

- 25 were to progress to Further Education;
- 7 to progress to employment (including apprenticeships), 3 of whom were to stay in employment for 26 weeks;
- 13 to be engaged in job search activity with a Third sector organisation or Jobcentre Plus and work on Skills for Life.

The project overachieved on its targets in spite of having to deal with severe weather and a lengthy Christmas break. Although the amount of contact varied between individuals, the average length of time was four sessions. Those with the highest needs spent six weeks on the programme whilst for others very few sessions were required to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Follow up was not always easy, however, as once placed in a course or job the learners were in a different phase of their lives and information from providers could be sparse.

Almost all the work done on this project was 1-to-1 and the staff involved were unanimous in their view that given the nature of the client group the time allowed was inadequate; staff had all spent more time with clients than the funding covered.

To be closer to the client group and overcome travel issues associated with gang culture, the project based itself in Jobcentre Plus or, more successfully, at a Connexions Centre in Woolwich rather than the Centre in Eltham. Initial meetings were held at Jobcentre Plus or the Connexions Centre and later sessions were organised in coffee shops, and other locations that were comfortable and convenient for the client group.

One learner described what the project had done for her over seven or eight sessions: *"I'd been working at a company on a contract but my hours got cut to nothing. I live with my mum but I'd got a few debts and I needed something steady. I'd applied for a position but got turned down. I was a bit down because of the rejections. We completely gutted my CV and did two versions; one long and one more summarised. They showed me how to do a tailored CV and a good covering letter. We did interviews and role plays and then sending CVs and looking at jobs and job specs"*. This young woman has now got a job within StreetVibes itself as a receptionist and with opportunities within the music business. She has chosen this over an apprenticeship in the music business because of travel issues. She has rejected the possibility of University because of a fear of the debts she is likely to accrue.

The young people recruited to the programme had mixed experience of learning and employment although given the age group most of the work experience was of a part-time, casual nature. Contrary to what might be expected the majority of the young women on the project had 4 or 5 GCSEs at grades A – D but had fallen out of educational provision between school and college. In spite of this a number had literacy or numeracy problems.

## **Retention**

This was an IAG project with relatively short engagement although this did vary between participants. However, given the nature of the client group, keeping them involved and open to moving on to study or work over a short period of time was challenging. All the staff felt that a longer period of engagement might have produced more long-lasting impact and significance for the individuals concerned.

Retention through the guidance period was secured through close 1-to-1 contact and monitoring. Some small incentives such as £10 phone top up to keep in touch or paying fares were utilised. Staff were able to relate well to the client group as they too were relatively young with similar backgrounds. A non-judgemental, personal approach from staff having the availability to speak to clients on the phone was crucial. Contact with a single person was important and this was contrasted with Jobcentre Plus, for example, where faces continually changed. Even though the project had finished, learners still rang staff for advice and support as their circumstances changed.

## **Progression**

Choosing the right location was fundamental to the project's success and much was made of the advantages of the Connexions Centre where other forms of support and signposting were on hand, giving holistic support to vulnerable young people.

Moving the young people onto FE provision involved partnership working. However, the project sought 'roll on, roll off' opportunities which did not exist in many curriculum areas.

Learners saw some benefits to community based provision as it was less like “studying” and, for project staff was a preferable progression route since when it came to following up on learners’ progress, VCS organisations were more likely to know individuals than in the larger institutions.

## **Partnership Working**

As part of the Foundation Learning Framework and association with local authority 14 – 19 teams, the project had a range of informal partners. In addition, there were formal year-long partnership agreements with Jobcentre Plus to provide information about job-opportunities and benefits help.

Partnerships with employers were not a strong element of this project. Relationships were difficult to establish and could be affected by one learner failing to turn up for an interview or presenting themselves badly.

### *Recruitment*

- recruiting at places where young people would go as they were unlikely to be motivated to seek out provision;
- working with Connexions was a key recruitment method since their staff knew which young people would benefit most from referral to StreetVibes;
- providing advice on benefits, since the fear of losing benefits was a barrier to participation;
- drawing on a range of methods including on the street recruitment and fliers distributed through partner organisations backed up by personal contact;
- setting up a successful relationship with the young person before beginning to insist on expectations being met.

### *Retention*

- flexibility in accommodating young women’s concerns over transport and location of training;
- availability and reliability - being available to young people when they want to talk and delivering on any promises made;

- being prepared to learn from young women about the culture and mores in which they operate;
- employing empathetic and experienced staff able to relate to the client group.

### *Progress*

- in-depth knowledge of training and work opportunities in the local area and within a 10 mile radius;
- even though the project had finished, learners still rang staff for advice and support as their circumstances changed;
- locating some of the training in local Connexions offices where other forms of support and signposting were on hand.

### **Contact details**

Richard Wrigley

StreetVibes

0203 031 8240

[richard@streetvibes.org](mailto:richard@streetvibes.org)

[www.streetvibes.org](http://www.streetvibes.org)

## **Case Study 10: Cornwall – Cornwall Development Company - Gwellheans Bal Maidens**

### **Background**

This project is one of a number of projects funded through the Community Grants programme with the funding allocated to small community based VCS organisations – preferably those with no previous history of ESF funding – by the Cornwall Development Company. It is run by Gwellheans, a charity set up in 1996 whose focus is the provision of a structured and holistic programme for people in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. Major funding for Gwellheans comes from the DWP, Drug and Alcohol Treatment and the Skills Funding Agency Learning Partnership. All of it is short term and relies on bidding for money. The organisation has a small board of Trustees and operates in five other Cornish towns including one where the provision is for people still using drugs or alcohol. The extremely rural character of Cornwall and the limited public transport system means this provision of outreach centres is essential for the charity.

Gwellheans has eight full time staff with five part timers and nine facilitators across its five sites. It also has a volunteer workforce of 25. The provision made by the organisation which forms the background support to the ESF project includes acupuncture, yoga, art and craft activities, an off-road motorcycle group, woodwork and a range of complementary therapies. A partnership with Cornwall College supplies courses in healthy eating and creative writing and the organisation delivers Skills for Life sessions in house. Partnerships with other organisations have resulted in further provision for the Centre's clients, for example, Women's Aid provide a programme for survivors of domestic violence and parenting skills are also provided by Action for Children.

The project, called Bal Maidens - the name given to the women who raked through the debris at the surface in Cornish tin mines, received ESF funding through a competitive bidding process and the funding agency Cornwall Development Company was very satisfied with the quality of the work being provided under the contract. The programme was staffed by two women, the Operations Manager whose main responsibilities related to the employment skills and literacy and

numeracy aspects of the programme and the Programme Manager whose functions related to client welfare and social inclusion. They were supported by a volunteer who provided peer support and mentoring to the women.

## **Training**

The programme began on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009 and ended in December 2010 although Gwellheans were maintaining a women's group from their own funds albeit with a reduced curriculum of activities. The funding was for a women's group which provided, alongside a range of activities to promote social rehabilitation, job search and CV development skills. Both the funding agency and the staff at Gwellheans were clear that there were no employment targets for the project. However, some of the women had moved on to further education and training, to volunteering and in a few cases to employment.

The activities carried out with ESF funding were informal and varied. The group which varied in size from two to 12 met weekly on a Friday from 11am – 2.00 pm and the programme included craft activities, arts workshops, trips to local attractions and therapeutic activities all done in an environment where sharing of experiences and discussion were part of the package. Among the activities were the job search and CV preparation which were required by the funder and these were explained to the women as essential if the group was to continue. Bal Maidens was a women only group whereas many of the other activities run through Gwellheans were mixed. The women on the project were all white and had in common their struggle to recover from addiction, whether to alcohol or to drugs. Ages ranged from late 20s to early 60s with a majority of the women aged between 30 and 50. Educational attainment among the women varied, a significant majority had low or no qualifications and a number had literacy and numeracy needs. However, a few were highly educated and had professional backgrounds but had been damaged by their substance abuse. The women themselves were open about their issues seeing the group as one of the ways in which they were able to feel supported to manage life without alcohol or drugs. However, it was rarely just the women's group alone that was providing this support but the range of activities available through Gwellheans.

## **Barriers**

The women taking part had huge challenges in engaging in any form of education and training- even the relatively informal provision offered by the project. The personal histories of the women left them with very severe confidence issues. Almost all the women had mental health problems and many had physical problems resulting from their previous lifestyle including mobility difficulties. As a group they almost all had one or more health issues.

In terms of family life the women had very challenging circumstances; many came from backgrounds where abuse and neglect were endemic and intergenerational. Their addiction and past behaviour often meant that they were not able to live with their children or, in some cases, to see them. Many had difficult relationships with partners who might also be substance abusers. Lifestyles were chaotic and relapses into substance abuse were common. A number of the women interviewed stated that they had been attending the group for the last few months but that they had attended it for a six month period “before” indicating a period of difficulty in between. Where the women had children, childcare was a problem – the project was not funded to offer childcare support.

Poverty was a substantial barrier to these women, only one or two participants over the life of the project were working and almost all were on benefits. Their chaotic lifestyles often meant that they were not getting the benefits they were entitled to and they were in constant fear of them being withdrawn. As a group they were poor and one of the advantages the project had to offer to them through Gwellheans was benefits advice provided by Cornwall County Council along with support in making necessary phone calls or even support at appeals.

Transport was a huge barrier to these women not only on account of cost (the project was able to pay transport costs and even in some circumstances provide these “up front”) but also because of the logistics of travel in such a rural area. Some women were spending two hours getting to the group because of the complexities of using public transport. The women interviewed, when discussing joint activities, had to make complicated plans for travel together.

Many of the women had to fit their attendance to the group and other training and therapeutic activities into a complicated pattern of appointments with other agencies. Many were involved with probation, social services in relation to access to children, health providers because of their physical or mental health problems and other agencies who were part of their care and rehabilitation package.

Almost all the women had a number of these barriers at once and these multiple factors very much impacted on their abilities to engage with provision. However, many believed that the structure given by the programme at Gwellheans, of which Bal Maidens was part, was the solution to their problems: *“I go there most days except Thursday – I’m looking for something then – it’s something to get up for and do in the day”* and another said *“it’s when I’ve got nothing to do it’s hard not to get into drink”*.

## **Recruitment**

The Gwellheans project was well known throughout Cornwall by the relevant agencies and clients were referred to it when they were at a certain stage in their recovery journey. The project had run open days but there was no specific marketing of the ESF programme. Women came into the group following the usual induction process to Gwellheans which involved an in depth induction session within a maximum of five days after referral and a guarantee of being placed in provision within five days of induction. For all the women Bal Maidens was only one part of their engagement and they were encouraged to overcome their barriers by the whole package of support offered. The referral and induction process and the information it gave about the constraints and aspirations of the women was seen as central to the success achieved.

## **Retention**

There had been problems with retention in the women’s group, this had led to the women themselves setting up what was called the “rubric” of what was expected of group members and the peer pressure this exerted had improved attendance. The support of the women for each other was identified as a strong factor in promoting attendance. Sharon said *“it’s good because you’ve been through the same things, if*

*you've got a problem with benefit or something someone will have had it and know what they did*'. The support volunteer was described as marvellous and women identified other learners as particularly helpful in certain ways. Several learners declared that *"no-one judges you"*; this was considered significant to those who had difficult and complex problems in their past lives.

The women were enthusiastic about the craft activities and through the project they had done new things and visited new places. One woman had started another women's group following a training course she had undertaken. Attending the group was set in a wider context of the range of help offered by the overarching Gwellheans project. Every woman had a key worker within Gwellheans and this was the source of vital on-going support.

## **Partnership Working**

Gwellheans had a very significant network of partners and these added to the richness of the offer made to the women involved with the project. Formal partnerships were held with funders and with Jobcentre Plus and Cornwall College although informal co-operation led to much of the provision at the Centre. Women's Aid, the local mental health charity Pentreath, Cornwall County Council's benefits advice service and a range of other organisations were working in and with the Centre and this network made Gwellheans a one-stop shop for many.

## **Success factors**

### *Recruitment*

- the non-judgemental and non-patronising approach is important in engaging women whose personal histories left them with severe confidence issues: "we tell them, we deal with the person you are today, never mind what you've done before. We say we see the best of you and that is what we work with;"
- the Gwellheans project was well known in Cornwall by the relevant agencies. Clients were referred to it when they were at a certain stage in their recovery journey;

- women came into the group following an induction process to Gwellheans involving an in-depth session within a maximum of five days after referral and a guarantee of being placed in provision within five days of induction.

### *Retention*

- all the women had individual support through the key worker system;
- the group understood each other's problems and could help and support each other;
- the range of holistic support the women could access within the wider Gwellheans offer.

### *Progress*

- there were no employment targets for the project. However, activities included job search and CV preparation and some of the women moved on to further education and training, to volunteering and in a few cases to employment.

### **Contact details**

Christine Dale

Gwellheans

01209 211825

[Christine@gwellheans.co.uk](mailto:Christine@gwellheans.co.uk)

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The research provided insights into the barriers that hinder women from training and employment and successful strategies to address them. It illustrated the diverse and multiple challenges that many women face. Many are not new, especially the tension between domestic duties and caring responsibilities and accessing training and employment. However, their persistence over many years is testament to the fact that they are deep seated, and that as the underlying factors vary, differentiated responses are required.

The study illuminated the profound challenges faced by women experiencing multiple disadvantages, which were manifested in many different combinations. The overwhelming message was that successful providers identify the particular barriers for individual participants then personalise flexible strategies and approaches in teaching, learning and support to address them. Successful providers 'go an extra mile' to put in place customised, creative ways to ensure that their women participants have every opportunity to flourish. There is awareness of the negative impact of creating dependency and the emphasis is on support to independence.

Training for employment in a recession is challenging. There are particular challenges when working with women, especially those experiencing multiple disadvantages, who might be a long way from the labour market. The recession can affect attitudes. It deters some from even considering work as they feel it is hopeless, whilst others are galvanised to seek entry to the labour market as family members lose jobs or other income sources are cut. Successful providers tailor provision to potential employment or self-employment. They perform a delicate balance of raising and broadening aspirations within the context of the opportunities but also constraints of local labour markets. They also develop constructive partnerships with local employers to secure opportunities for work experience and paid work for their recruits. Inevitably, the reduction in sustainable jobs in many areas due to the recession will affect women's chances of success. This makes it even more imperative that pre-employment programmes recruit women and offer the most relevant training and support to heighten their job prospects within this context

It is pertinent to note here that men might face similar obstacles to some of those described here. The critical point is that to have most chance of success, strategies must be customised. The same strategies might be appropriate for both men and women but this research indicates that they are very likely to differ for some women or in some aspects of the training. The primary message though is that to give all participants the highest chance of success, whatever their gender, providers should avoid making assumptions, identify the real barriers facing participants and potential participants then adopt appropriate, flexible and personalised approaches to meet their needs.

The following section recommends actions that providers and the Skills Funding Agency can adopt to increase the participation and success of women participants in ESF funded training.

## **Actions for providers**

### **Recruitment**

#### ***To engage and recruit women to your provision***

- research the groups you want to work with;
- use word of mouth;
- undertake outreach work involving volunteers or paid workers;
- offer informal activity such as coffee mornings or informal taster sessions;
- work closely with referral agencies and other organisations;
- advertise on flyers and newspaper adverts;
- use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and web blogs.

### **On programme**

### ***The structure and content of your training***

- make sure it is accessible – consider location, dates and times;
- make sure that women's childcare and/or financial support needs are considered;
- make sure that access routes are in place;
- offer gender appropriate initial assessment;
- design programmes of appropriate length;
- consider on-line learning or training as an option;
- design content that is gender sensitive, flexible, creative and tailored;
- build content and approaches to raise confidence and self-esteem into the programme;
- include employability and job search skills;
- involve employers in the programme design and /or delivery;
- relate the content to the local labour market within a framework of raising aspirations and broadening concepts of potential employment avenues;
- encourage the development of self-employment and enterprise;
- build in opportunities for structured work experience or volunteering – with guaranteed interviews at the end where possible.
- put in place progression routes that are tailored and realistic.

### **Support**

- identify support needs and offer personalised support;
- plan and offer support in ways that foster independence;
- consider whether women-only groups are appropriate;
- contact women to encourage them to stay the course including introductory and follow phone calls and/or texts;
- identify and offer support for literacy, language and numeracy development;
- offer one-to-one support in the classroom for women who need it;
- consider mentor and buddy approaches;

- use discretionary funds to provide resources and cover costs such as lunches, clothing, equipment, attendance allowances – to encourage retention and progression;
- provide financial assistance for work experience placements and make work placements easier for both employers and the employees/trainees.

## **IAG**

- equip mentors, buddies, champions and tutors to provide initial advice and to know when to refer;
- attach IAG workers and skills advisors to each programme;
- offer information, advice and guidance at all stages of the programme;
- develop participants' skills to access and interpret information;
- offer advice and support relating to a range of issues, especially finance, either in-house or through specialist organisations.

## **Progression**

- offer women opportunities to continue their development programme;
- work with partners to develop flexible progression routes and outputs;
- support continuing job-search and progression to employment;
- work with employers to secure employment opportunities.

## **Partnerships**

- develop structured partnerships with a range of public and third sector organisations and employers with clarity of purpose, expectations and outcomes;
- develop strong relationships with Jobcentre Plus advisors and advisors working with other agencies to support signposting and referrals;

- develop progression routes into and from your provision in partnership with other providers.

## **Employer engagement**

- research the local labour market and recruitment issues that employers face;
- compile evidence of the business benefits for employers of engaging with the programme;
- build relationships with employers to support the programme, for instance contribute to content or offer work experience placements;
- offer incentives where possible for employers to offer work placements and / or take on new workers – this can be in kind, such as training or post-employment support.

## **Areas for further research**

This research explored a number of factors which might impact on women's ability to engage in pre-employment training. It became clear during the course of the desk research and fieldwork that little is known about the relationship between sexuality and even less so in relation to gender identity. These issues were largely invisible in the research as projects did not collect data on sexuality and staff did not discuss sexuality or gender identity issues. Unsurprisingly, learners did not disclose their sexuality or discuss gender identity in relation to trans issues during the group interviews. This indicates that there is little awareness of any impact of sexuality or trans issues on learning which could disadvantage these learners. We recommend that experiences of staff and learners in relation to sexuality and gender identity and ESF training would best be explored in a focussed study.

## **Issues for ESF/the Skills Funding Agency/DWP**

The research has indicated areas of successful practice in recruiting and training women. There are also structural changes that could support this process which are outlined below:

### **Finance**

- Ensure that providers are aware of sources of funding to contribute to the costs of childcare, other caring responsibilities or transport while on the programme and to support entry into work – so that the support continues for the first period in work (3 – 6 months)

### **Changes to ESF structures and regulations**

- Set aside some ESF funding (ready-matched) outside of prime contractors to fund small, specialist organisations at local or sub-regional level to run individualised, tailor-made provision to meet specific needs. Include more options for direct contracting with community based and non-profit

organisations. This would involve increasing the options for VCS-led consortia and 'small' VCS providers; this could include ensuring co-financing programmes are in place or that match funding sources are found to support community based provision

- Innovation is important – providers need to be prepared to try new things and funders need to be flexible to support this. Allow some risk taking, allow some projects to 'fail' – but don't penalise them – make sure that evaluations are used to learn the lessons
- Minimise or cut bureaucracy and administration costs and move this funding to frontline work which directly supports learners/clients; this can only be done if ESF rules/regulations are more flexible
- Make sure that recent migrants to the UK are eligible to take part in programmes
- Enable providers not to go for 'quick wins' –for example, pay per intervention for those furthest away from a job.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Evidence Review**

This review of the literature considers the barriers preventing women from engaging in employment and training in England within the wider context of women's employment patterns and their attitudes towards work and training. Finally, successful strategies to address these obstacles and to engage unemployed women in training are detailed. Much of the literature reviewed was published in the UK since 2005 to locate recent thinking in the field although some earlier publications have been drawn upon whose findings remain pertinent today. A list of sources consulted can be found at the end of this review.

#### **Women's employment patterns**

This literature review focuses on women in and out with the labour market in England. However, a woman may not necessarily focus on her gender when thinking of how she identifies herself. It may be her sexuality or ethnic group which she feels most identifies her and the other individuals or group(s) with which she identifies. Molloy et al (2003) explored the interactions between disability, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality in relation to disadvantage and education, employment and training. They cautioned that "*Exploring self-identity is a hugely complex issue both in terms of research approaches and in terms of the challenges it presents to participants. A persistent finding was that people were reluctant to single out individual characteristics, such as age, disability, or gender as dominant features of their identity*" (p.2). Their qualitative research with disabled participants discovered that "*people were most comfortable engaging with the concept of ethnic identity*" particularly amongst South Asian and black African and Caribbean participants but less so amongst white participants (p.2). Whilst this review will look at women and consider disability, gender identity, sexuality and ethnicity amongst other factors in

relation to employment and training, it is worth highlighting that women themselves may not identify with any of these particular characteristics<sup>32</sup>.

What do we know of women's employment patterns? Figures from 2010 indicate that of the 2.5 million people unemployed in the UK, 1.48 million were men and 1.02 million were women<sup>33</sup>. In 2009, the redundancy rates more than doubled for women and men over the course of that year to 15.1 and 8.3 per thousand in the first quarter<sup>34</sup>. There is a substantial body of research which testifies to the following: women in the UK primarily work in part-time, low paid jobs. In 2010, approximately 1.9 million men worked part time compared to 5.7 million women<sup>35</sup>. The number of part-time workers rose in 2010 by 142,000 to 7.98 million; the highest since 1992<sup>36</sup>. Women are more likely to use flexible, term-time, job share and home working than men in the labour market<sup>37</sup>, for example, 90 per cent of home workers are women<sup>38</sup> and ethnic minority women make up a substantial proportion of that percentage<sup>39</sup>.

Women tend to cluster in a few occupations<sup>40</sup>; gender segregation has been resilient in the UK with over 50 per cent of women working in just 10 (of 77) occupations. The 6Cs – cashiering, caring, clerical, cleaning, childcare and catering characterise the major share of women's work alongside teaching<sup>41</sup>. Part-time working and economic inactivity is more common amongst women of working age than men<sup>42</sup> because although unemployment rates are higher for men than women, figures do not include the economically inactive, which in 2009, constituted 43.2 per cent of all women of working age and 29.2 per cent of men<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Booker & Boice (2007) also caution that the view of assessing individuals solely within a reference group is out-dated and ineffective. They suggest barriers are seen as generic barriers which affect a cross-section of groups. Indeed, many of the barriers to employment and training discussed in this review are applicable to men.

<sup>33</sup> *Guardian*, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Government Equalities Office, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Groom, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Unionlearn, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Fawcett, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Fawcett, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Government and Equalities Office, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Perrons, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2010

<sup>43</sup> Leaker, 2009.

Women have more career interruptions<sup>44</sup> and over 70 per cent of women are likely to become carers during their lifetime<sup>45</sup>. The majority of lone parents (over 90 per cent) are female<sup>46</sup>.

### *Gender pay gap*

One measure of economic equality between men and women is the 'gender pay gap' or measure of male and female wage disparity. Interestingly the most recent figures suggest that the pay rate of women part-time workers has improved and surpasses that of men. Based on median hourly earnings, the full-time gender pay gap narrowed by 2 percentage points between 2009 and 2010. For full-time employees the pay gap is 10.2 per cent, down from 12.2 per cent in 2009; the biggest fall in the gender pay gap since the measure was first produced in 1997. For part-time employees the gap has widened in favour of women, extending to minus 4.0 per cent, compared with minus 2.5 per cent in 2009. In April 2010, median hourly earnings rates for men were £13.01 for full-timers, £7.69 for part-timers and £12.35 for all employees. For women, hourly rates were £11.68 for full-timers, £8.00 for part-timers and £9.90 for all employees<sup>47</sup>. A supplementary measure, mean hourly earnings, reveals that men's full time hourly earnings were £16.25, up 1.1 per cent from £16.07 in 2009. Women's mean hourly earnings increased by 2.2 per cent to £13.73 compared with £13.44 in 2009. This means that the gender pay difference narrowed to 15.5 per cent from 16.4 per cent in 2009<sup>48</sup>.

### *Multiple disadvantage*

These then are the headlines in relation to women's current employment patterns in the UK. However, once we start to consider other identifiable characteristics such as age, disability, ethnicity and sexuality we see that some 'groups' may be more disadvantaged in the labour market than others. For example, refugee women

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<sup>44</sup> Government and Equalities Office, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Turner & Casey, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> DWP, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Office for National Statistics, Dec 2010. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cii/nugget.asp?id=167>

<sup>48</sup> 2010 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ashe1210.pdf> n.b. 15.5% is the figure used by Fawcett. <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1205>

experience higher rates of unemployment and those in work experience poor terms and conditions of pay and employment<sup>49</sup>. Arguably, there is one defining characteristic more than any other which has a detrimental effect on women in the labour market – motherhood. In 2009, the Fawcett Society proposed that motherhood had more of an impact than disability, age or race and has a “*direct and dramatic influence on women’s pay and employment prospects*” (Woodroffe 2009, p.3). So while the proportion of mothers in paid employment has increased over the last 40 years, it is estimated that 40 per cent of the female labour force is working below its potential<sup>50</sup>.

### *Motherhood*

There is a relationship between motherhood and poverty - the Government Equalities Office notes that “women with children have higher poverty rates than those without across all ethnic groups” and with ethnicity – “poverty rates are higher for women in all ethnic groups compared to white British men” (Nandi & Platt 2010, p.4). Bangladeshi and Pakistani women have very high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, approximately 80 per cent compared to between 30 and 50 per cent for other women<sup>51</sup>. A recent report concentrating on inequality in the UK<sup>52</sup> found when considering both gender and ethnicity in relation to employment, 44 per cent of Pakistani and 49 per cent of Bangladeshi women are economically inactive, looking after family or home, compared to 20 per cent or fewer for most of the other groups e.g. White British. Approximately a quarter of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are in paid work, compared to more than half of the other groups. There is also a gender and ethnicity pay gap. Fawcett suggest that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women earn only 56 per cent of the average hourly wage of white men<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Bloch, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Perrons, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Nandi & Platt, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Government Equalities Office, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Fawcett, 2008.

## *Ethnicity*

Black and minority ethnic women are disproportionately likely to be working in temporary jobs and black women are more likely to work for an employment agency<sup>54</sup>. Black women are also more likely to be lone parents<sup>55</sup>. It is expected that women will bear the brunt of the recession in upcoming months as they are heavily represented in the public sector, in health, education and social work; the TUC noted in 2006 that black and black British women were more likely to work in the public sector than men or women from any other ethnic group<sup>56</sup>.

## *Disability and health*

Women who are disabled are less likely to be in employment than women who are not disabled. *An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK: Report of the National Equality Panel* (Government Equalities Office 2010) utilises data from large scale national sample surveys, including the Labour Force Survey and the Family Resources Survey. Using data to 2008, they conclude that “*Disabled people face some of the greatest employment disadvantages of any group we examine. However, the extent of this disadvantage depends on the type of impairment, and on its severity and duration*” (p.117). In particular, mental health problems, for example, are more associated with poor employment prospects than others. Estimates of employment rates by type of impairment drawn from the Labour Force Survey range, from under 20 per cent for people with mental illness, phobia or panic, or people with learning difficulties, to over 60 per cent for people with skin conditions and allergies, diabetes, or chest or breathing problems. Fourteen per cent of women with DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) and work-limiting disability are employed full-time compared to 42 per cent of women who are not disabled<sup>57</sup>. A review of inequalities in education, employment and training noted in its review of the literature that a “*low level of employment among disabled people is well known in disability studies. Poor educational qualifications are a factor, although disabled people are 30 per cent more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people with the same qualification*”

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<sup>54</sup> TUC, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Fawcett, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> TUC, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Government Equalities Office, 2010.

(Li et al 2008, p. 9). They argue that the research points to a lack of enthusiasm on the part of employers to make the adjustments the Government has urged in order for disabled adults to enter the workplace.

### *Sexuality*

The Equality and Human Rights Commission report (Li et al 2008) also considers sexuality in relation to the labour market. They found that as with gender and disability, *“there is no definitive map of the position of gay men and lesbian women in the labour market... The spotlight has been on the suppression of sexualities in the workplace, which are often dominated by heterosexual men”* and the evidence in relation to that suggests *“the suppression of homosexuality in the face of discrimination and hostility in the workplace thwarts career progression”* (Li et al 2008, p.12). Research with 130 lesbian, gay and bi-sexual individuals in Derbyshire focusing on learning opportunities and support services found that the most common sentiment in relation to employment was *“that sexuality had not explicitly influenced respondents' employment choices but, on the other hand, they might be more inclined to apply to a place if they believed it had positive attitudes towards LGB people”* (ECOTEC 2006, p.32). However, analysis of data from the General Household Survey and Labour Force Survey found that couples in same sex relationships had higher employment levels; *“In this analysis we found that men and women in same-sex relationships had the highest rates of employment across the total population of men and women (87 and 84 per cent respectively) and the lowest rates of unemployment and inactivity”* (Li et al p. 21 see also Government Equalities Office 2010).

### *Gender identity*

There is little research into the effects of gender identity on employment and the trans population generally. A survey from 2007 found that the *“workplace afforded a poor experience for many respondents”* with one-quarter of trans people experiencing trans phobia in the workplace in the forms of harassment and bullying<sup>58</sup>. Some reported experiencing verbal and physical abuse in the workplace.

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<sup>58</sup> Whittle, S., Turner, L. and Al-Alami, M. (2007). *Engendered penalties: Transgender and*

In addition, the group *A:gender* (a support network for staff in government departments/agencies who have changed or need to change permanently their perceived gender, or who identify as intersex) suggest that members of the trans community are consistently found working at levels well below their capability possibly because of changing jobs either voluntary or involuntary<sup>59</sup>.

### **Attitudes towards employment and training**

When considering a cohort which comprises approximately half the population<sup>60</sup> it is difficult to make generalisations about attitudes to employment and training but there are a number of messages which do emerge from the literature which are worth exploring.

#### *Factors affecting attitudes towards work*

Many women who are unemployed or economically inactive want to work<sup>61</sup>. Indeed there is a cohort of women with children who 'work for nothing' after paying for childcare just in order to stay in work (Turner & Casey 2007). The attitudes of women to what employment is possible and appropriate for them and their families are shaped by their caring duties; women view work in the context of their wider roles and responsibilities (Green et al 2004). While some women who become mothers make a positive choice to stay at home with their children and do not see gaining employment as a priority, such as many of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Tackey et al's study (2006), there are others who remain at home with their children who wish to work but cannot do so. Grant and Buckner (2006), for example, found that some mothers who were not in employment worried about the example of worklessness they were setting to their children. A survey of over 600 South Asian British women by the Quilliam Foundation found that the majority of women wanted to work and of those who did not want to work (39 per cent), approximately half cited domestic responsibilities as an inhibitor (Dyke & James 2009).

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Transsexual People's Experiences of Inequality and Discrimination. London: EHRC in GEO, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> GEO 2010, p.222.

<sup>60</sup> 31.2 million females compared with 30.2 million males in 2008. Office for National Statistics, 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Grant & Buckner note that in 2004, nearly 1.5 million women who were not working wanted to work (p.10).

Employment amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women was viewed negatively by some women in a DWP study of 2007 since it resulted in a lack of time with children and family. For other women it was seen positively since it enabled them to contribute to the family income and brought financial independence. Work was also perceived as giving women control over their lives, a better social life, self-esteem, confidence and better health (Aston et al 2007) – a mix of perceptions which are probably shared by many women. Similarly, Molloy et al's research exploring disability and diversity discovered that disabled participants expressed a range of positive attitudes towards work relating to “*self-worth, a sense of independence, overcoming feelings of isolation, and being able to earn money*” (2003, p.7).

### *Gender and training*

Training is more common among women than men<sup>62</sup> although men tend to take up work based training opportunities more than women<sup>63</sup>. Research from the University of Sussex notes the ‘trickle down’ principle where those in employment at the top of organisations are more likely to be offered training than those at the bottom<sup>64</sup>. Turner and Casey noted that although more men than women participate in vocational work based learning, women dominate the take up of adult and community learning (2007). The overall proportion of women engaged in vocational educational training lags behind men in the majority of countries around the world<sup>65</sup>. Motherhood, again, may influence decisions women make about training; “*they may put less priority on their formal training and employment if they think they will soon start a family*” (Woodroffe 2009, p.9).

In relation to apprenticeships for 16 to 18 year olds in England while take up by males and females is about equal (47.2 per cent female in 2008-9) females are over-represented in child care (97.1) and hairdressing (91.2), for example, and under-represented in construction (1.6) and plumbing (2.6 per cent) (IES 2009) illustrating

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<sup>62</sup> Government Equalities Office, 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Unionlearn, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Booker & Boice, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> City and Guilds, 2008.

gender segregation. Indeed, Unionlearn assert that both sexes are unlikely to have access to training for non-traditional jobs for their sex<sup>66</sup>.

### *Attitudes to employment and the economic downturn*

More recently, research by the DWP (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010) found that women with children or women who have never been in the labour market may see the recession as putting employment and training out of their reach. They also noted that older people coming up to retirement may not see employment as an option and training for employment geared to the young. Conversely, research from the Government Equalities Office in relation to the economic downturn found that some women in older age groups talked about returning to work and changing from part-time to full-time employment to bring more money in (Clark et al 2009).

### **Obstacles/barriers to participation in employment and training**

The following section considers barriers to participation in employment and training for women which emerge from much of the literature. Barriers to employment appear to have received more attention in the literature but there are some useful lessons to be drawn from research which explores the engagement of women with learning which are useful in this context.

#### *Lack of fluency in English*

Lack of English language skills present a barrier to engaging in employment and training (Tackey et al, 2006; DWP, 2007; Booker & Boice, 2007; Ward & Spacey, 2008; Dyke & James; Iliam, 2009; CLES 2009). For example, a study of 100 Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women which looked at learning found that *“language becomes a factor when we look at plans and aspirations. Some of the women identified their lack of English as a barrier to working and a need to learn English before looking for a job”* (Ward & Spacey 2008, p.39). Indeed, it could be argued that some of the women in that study had a long way to go before they could even consider training and employment since a lack of English resulted in the following: *“They described how it affects their ability to assert their rights, access*

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<sup>66</sup> Unionlearn, 2007.

*health care and other services, interact with others in a range of different situations... Some do not feel they can talk to neighbours, answer the door or use the phone... They cannot use public transport or learn to drive*" (Ward & Spacey 2008, p.32). As a result, *"Fluency in English has been found to increase people's probability of being employed by up to 25 per cent"* (Tackey et al 2006, p.2). Bloch notes that of the small proportion of refugee women in employment, those in work are more likely to be fluent in English<sup>67</sup>. Aside from the practical barrier of not being able to communicate effectively, proficiency in English may help increase women's confidence<sup>68</sup> and may even *"broaden their (Muslim women) horizons beyond working in specific sectors where South Asians are concentrated"* (Quilliam 2009, p.41).

### *Lack of affordable childcare*

Women undertake a disproportionate share of childcare. Caring responsibilities generally, whether for children or other family members can restrict women's ability to engage in employment and training. If there is no affordable childcare or respite care available then without supportive and willing family or friends to help out, women cannot participate. Even if there is formal childcare available, some groups of women are not always comfortable with using it. Aston et al (2007) found that use of formal childcare was uncommon amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women as did Bunglawala (2008) who found that none of the 50 Muslim women interviewed had ever accessed formal childcare and only 14 of the women in work stated they would access formal childcare in the future. The cost and availability of childcare can be an even bigger barrier to lone parents (Ritchie et al 2005) as a review of inequalities in education, employment and training found, *"Lack of childcare options is still a considerable barrier to women with children under 11, especially lone mothers with young children who return to work earlier or work full-time"* (Li et al 2008, p.3).

### *Lack of jobs and training with family friendly hours*

The timing of training, for example, can be crucial for women with children of school age who need it to be during school hours; *"lack of flexibility in the timing of training*

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<sup>67</sup> Bloch, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Tackey et al (2006) noted that *"more often, their lack of confidence was precipitated by poor language skills, which made it difficult for them to undertake effective job search"* (p.344).

*courses is one of the key barriers women face to entering the labour market and progressing in it*" (Women and Work Commission 2009, p. 23). Similarly, there is a long work hour culture in the UK, preventing many women with children of school age from participation in the labour market<sup>69</sup>. While legislation in the UK permits parents and carers who meet certain criteria to ask their employer for flexible working, which can help women balance their work and home responsibilities, at present that request is made once in post. Recent statistics show that 22.5 per cent of full time and 27.1 per cent of all employees have some kind of flexible working pattern with female workers more likely than male employees to have such an arrangement in place<sup>70</sup>.

### *Limiting job seeking strategies*

There is less research available on women's job seeking strategies. However, what we do know is that occupational segregation starts at an early age<sup>71</sup> which means that even young women perceive jobs in terms of gender appropriateness which can be limiting in terms of career aspirations and choice and job search. Some groups of women may be characterised by low employment aspirations such as refugee women<sup>72</sup>.

Women returning to work after maternity leave are often looking for a job with flexible working hours which may mean that they search for jobs at a lower level than those they are qualified to do<sup>73</sup>. Leaker in the *Economic and Labour Market Review* looking at Labour Force Survey data to September 2008 noted that unemployed women are more likely to be looking for part- time work than men; 45 per cent to 16.9 per cent (2009).

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<sup>69</sup> National Skills Forum, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Women and Work Commission, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Bloch, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> National Skills Forum, 2009.

Grant and Buckner's report of the Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets (GELLM) Programme<sup>74</sup> in England discovered that women were aware that better jobs were often available in nearby towns and cities but those with children felt that the daily commute was neither desirable nor possible. Women wanted to work close by to their children so that they could be accessible to them if needed. Similarly, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in a study from 2006 specifically looked for work which fitted around their childcare responsibilities which was often part-time and for which they were over qualified<sup>75</sup>. A study of 50 second-generation Muslim women in three cities found that one of the barriers to employment was inexperience in using existing support services to find work – *“half of the women respondents not in work had never been to a Jobcentre to ask for employment advice or support. Of those that did go to a Jobcentre, 78 per cent said they did not get the help they needed in order to improve their skills levels or find work”* (Bunglawala 2008, p.50).

Grant and Buckner (2006) found that some women in the GELLM Programme simply lacked accurate knowledge of where to look for job opportunities and had no relationship with employment agencies and services. Similarly, women who had recently migrated to England lacked knowledge of who could help them to find work. This was also highlighted by Tackey et al (2006) who observed that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's job searching was restricted by the narrow range of friends and family they came into contact with, the limited contacts they had outside their community and the declining manufacturing sectors they tended to work in.

#### *Location of training or employment*

The location of employment and training can prove to be a barrier for those with caring responsibilities who wish to stay close to family members and for those who prefer to work in their local community. Some women may not have the financial resources to travel from rural areas<sup>76</sup> to jobs or public transport links may be poor. Some women may simply prefer to work where their ethnic group is concentrated<sup>77</sup> but there may not be many suitable part-time jobs available locally. Indeed, where

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<sup>74</sup> GELLM involved 11 local authorities, the TUC and the Equal Opportunities Commission and was core funded by the European Social Fund.

<sup>75</sup> DWP, 2006.

<sup>76</sup> Green et al, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Tackey et al, 2006.

you live is critical in relation to the types of barriers to employment you may face if we consider that *“Worklessness varies according to the geography and economic base of a place. This is the reason why being workless in Manchester is a result of a different set of factors and reasons than being workless in County Durham”* (CLES 2009, p.29). The decline of heavy industry in certain parts of England and ensuing decline in local economic growth, local services and community pride are associated with poor health, anti-social behaviour and *“disassociation with education and skills”* (*ibid.*).

### *Lack of confidence*

Women with caring responsibilities are more likely to have interrupted employment histories (Grant & Bucker, 2006) and it is a history of full-time work which is the largest single factor affecting wages<sup>78</sup>. This interruption can lead to lack of confidence, lack of recent work experience and out dated qualifications. Attitudinal barriers such as lack of confidence are frequently cited as barriers to employment and training for both men and women.

### *Lack of support*

Women’s personal circumstances can also be a deterrent to work and/or training. Women who have little or no support from family and friends to work or train with little money available for transport or childcare may feel stuck.

### *Negative attitudes about training and employment*

Attitudes to employment and training are critical. Women, for example, who cannot speak English, with few qualifications and who have been out of the labour market for periods of time will not feel confident about applying for training schemes and jobs. They may feel anxious about attending interviews and meeting new people. They may feel guilty about wanting to work if they have children or caring responsibilities and are situated in a cultural context which equates good mothering with staying at home. These may be compounded by structural barriers such as lack of suitable training schemes locally and a lack of affordable, reliable, local childcare.

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<sup>78</sup> Government Equalities Office, 2010.

All of these factors can prove to be barriers for women to engage in employment and training whether psychological, structural or personal - or a combination of all three types (McGivney 1993).

#### *Lack of qualifications*

A lack of qualifications or lack of UK qualifications in particular, is a barrier to employment and training. A review of the literature in relation to a number of groups such as migrants, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, homeless, prisoners and substance users found that “*the greatest generic barrier affecting all target groups was a lack of UK qualifications*” (Booker & Boice 2007, p.19). Similarly, DWP research amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women found that those with no formal qualifications were almost always unemployed (2007). Ritchie et al in their consideration of workless communities noted that a major barrier to employment for disabled people was their lack of qualifications (2005).

#### *Lack of a route in*

Some people need soft skills development – such as communication, language, friendliness, and ability to develop relationships with other people before they can think about developing their hard skills – the teachable, technical skills that enable you to carry out a job. An evaluation of worklessness concluded that offering introductory courses which do not necessarily lead to formal qualifications act as a hook “*to re-engage workless residents in positive activity, begin to develop soft skills such as working with others, and lead into other courses which have more of a focus on developing softer skills, gaining qualifications and eventually progressing towards work*” (CLES 2009, p.61).

#### *Discrimination and prejudice*

Some women believe employers discriminate against them on the basis of ethnicity or religion. For example, Dale et al (2008) found that some women believed that wearing a headscarf posed a barrier to getting a job whilst Tackey et al (2006) found that employer perceptions of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women may be influenced by stereotyping such as assuming Muslims might not be productive because they

have to pray multiple times daily. Bunglawala's small-scale study of 50 second generation British Muslim women found that half of the respondents wore the hijab at work and some "*highlighted that, while they could not be certain, they felt that they had missed out on progression opportunities because of religious discrimination and that the wearing of the hijab could have been a factor*" (2008, p.6). Post-code discrimination was mentioned by women in the GELLM Programme; there was concern that some employers see where job applicants live and consciously weed out the applications of those who come from certain locations.

Molloy et al's research with disabled adults found that participants made decisions about whether to work based on a number of factors including perceptions about the potential for discrimination by employers; "*The attitudes of some employers relating to the ethnicity, age and gender of applicants were also seen as additional barriers to finding work. In these cases, people described feeling that they had faced compounded disadvantage when seeking employment as they felt discriminated against both because of their disability and one of these additional factors*" (2003, p.8). Discrimination either perceived or real is important as a recent report which explored perceptions of discrimination in employment concluded because "*it has real consequences*" (Rolfe et al 2009, p. 113).

### **Successful strategies to address obstacles and engage unemployed women in training**

A variety of strategies to engage unemployed women in training are to be found in the literature. The following section discusses a range of approaches including those specifically detailed in a recent review of *Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities within the European Social Fund* (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). They have been arranged as responses to the following questions:

What does the training look like?

## **Flexible delivery and family friendly timings of classes/training to suit the individual**

Employment training attractive enough to engage women needs to be flexible for women with caring responsibilities. Newton et al (2005) noted that lone parents particularly favoured work trials with employers with flexible working patterns such as working part-time during the school day or term-time only. *A Woman's Place*, a NIACE project, which involved working with women from the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali communities in three London boroughs was designed to bring women in these communities together, identify their learning needs and help them access adult learning. They found that flexibility in delivery was very important to the women who were sometimes delayed by their home commitments (Konitou & Toole 2009).

## **Accessible**

Similarly, *Steps to Success* a project which supported unemployed people from black and minority ethnic communities in Leicester to develop their skills and access employment opportunities noted that of the key success factors “*flexible modes of delivery such as roll on/roll off provision to ensure that activities are accessible to all*” (2008, p.22) as was timing activities to accommodate religious festivals and times when some participants may visit relatives abroad.

## **Practical support**

The GELLM Programme which ran in 11 local authorities in England had some very useful findings in relation to what works for women. They state that providing work experience with support is crucial as it is recent employment experience which is key to securing a job as the work environment may look very different to what it did five or 10 years ago (Grant & Buckner 2006).

## **Personalised**

Within a client group some women may have minimal support needs whilst others may have significant needs. Advice must then be based on individual circumstances (Grant & Buckner 2006; LSC 2007; CLES 2009). One-to-one support provided by ESF programmes proved to be very successful when working with participants with

specialist needs, for example, with trans participants. That support might range from job search support to intensive help such as accompanying participants to interviews (McNaughton Nicholls 2010). Supporting participants with practical skills such as applying for jobs can help motivate and inspire people with confidence (Booker & Boice 2007) as can simple tasks such as advising female participants on what to wear to interviews (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

### **In fields where there are current labour shortages and local labour market specific**

Grant & Buckner 2006 also found that work experience should be in areas of expanding work where there are shortages of labour. They argue that a work experience approach is more successful than a skills first approach for women. The authors recognise that there are high costs involved with that approach and suggest schemes develop short, intensive job-focused training (Grant & Buckner 2006). Training schemes must therefore be job and local labour market specific (see also McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). Grant et al's findings into the GELLM Programme in Birmingham recommended that paid work experience was combined with training and education leading to qualifications (2006).

### **Confidence building**

An evaluation of ESF Global Grants<sup>79</sup> found that participants with poor mental health were particularly favourable about their involvement on programmes which helped build confidence, *“Many had been absent from the labour market for long periods and were consequently depressed, needing to build their confidence and self-esteem prior to moving back into work. Respondents with a long-standing illness or a disability were more likely than other groups to value and benefit from the increased self-confidence and motivation they gained from participating in the project. Particularly important was the social contact, peer support and daily routine which participation brought”* (Jones et al 2008, p. 45).

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<sup>79</sup>Global Grants were introduced in 2001 to provide small grants of up to £10,000 to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that would otherwise be unable to access mainstream ESF funding (Jones et al 2008).

## **Good links to employers to challenge misperceptions**

Programmes with good links to employers can challenge their perceptions of employing women with disabilities by awareness raising in relation to adjustments and government support available for them (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

Similarly, Bunglawala (2008) recommended the development of initiatives in the workplace which actively and openly addressed faith and dispelled myths through open dialogue sessions between Muslims and non-Muslims. Research published by Stonewall (2004) noted that the contact-hypothesis is a popular solution in encouraging respect for others; “*contact reduces people’s feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about others by encouraging a sense of familiarity and therefore predictability and control*” (p.20). Their research, however, went further and they state that it is the nature of the contact, rather than the contact itself, which is important. The work environment can be an important place to foster “*natural positive contact*” and friendship (Valentine & McDonald 2004, p.21).

Employment training can be a means to inform women who have never been in employment or had a break from the labour market of developments which affect their perceptions of employment, such as flexible working options and providing reassurance to those who perceive employers to be prejudiced (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). Conversely, programmes with good links with employers can persuade them of the benefits of flexible working or as Grant et al recommend, “*Encourage employers to ‘take a risk’ and employ local women*” (2006, p.2).

## **Good links to voluntary and community sector groups**

Training providers that work with and learn from community and voluntary groups about issues facing participants and the best ways to help and support them have a better chance of engaging women and retaining them on training courses. A *Woman’s Place* instigated workshops for local practitioners, Sure Start Children’s Centre staff, faith groups, voluntary organisations, health workers, learning providers and a number of other organisations who worked with women and learners to raise awareness of the project and to tap into existing networks and resources. This ensured the project was able to set up support groups in venues to provide

continued support to the women once the project ended (Konitou & Toole 2009). The process involved in setting up and delivering *A Woman's Place* is worthy of consideration in relation to successful strategies to address obstacles and engage unemployed women. Crudely, the process involved appointing 'barefoot workers' (local women from the same communities), holding two workshops to draw the relevant partners together with the worker to identify potential learners and develop activities, referral routes, IAG and partnerships, putting a support network in place, setting up support groups facilitated by the barefoot worker with a range of formal and informal learning provision organised and delivered by the partners from the support network. This approach to co-ordinating learning locally and responding to local needs proved successful in supporting women to be able to communicate, enjoy focused learning activity and "*support themselves into work*" (p.4).

### **Gender sensitive**

Employment projects aiming to attract women also need to understand the circumstances women find themselves in and recognise the differences between women (Grant et al 2006). McNaughton Nicholls et al recommend providers think about exploring participants' existing skills and their potential in creating self-employment opportunities.

### **Creative**

Stiell and Tang noted that art based creative activities could be positive for participants and empower them (2006).

### **What types of training do women prefer?**

#### *Work taster sessions*

An evaluation of ESF programmes found that it was important to challenge the perceptions of disabled participants that they could not engage in employment by arranging work taster sessions.

### *Voluntary placements*

Voluntary placements can be a good way to improve prospects, confidence and motivation but may work best in a not-for-profit organisation where there are many staff volunteers rather than being one unpaid staff member in a team being paid (Dyke & James 2009).

Where should it be held and who should attend?

### *Locally*

A review of ESF training in 2010 found that venues that were local and easy for participants to reach were important (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). Taxis were frequently used for participants with health difficulties and disabilities to enable them to access activities in the *Steps to Success* project (Gray 2008).

### *Friendly locations*

Participants need to feel comfortable in their environment. Suitable venues might include schools, community centres, and places of worship, nurseries and Children's Centres (Ward & Spacey 2008), or a local café - although a school environment may be off-putting for those with negative experiences of schooling (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

### *Online*

Opportunities to work or train remotely were found to be a useful way of working with disabled participants in ESF training (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). Similarly, providing training online may make it easier for women with caring responsibilities to fit in

### *Women-only*

A women only space can make training more attractive to those women who feel cultural and religious reasons prevent them from entering a mixed sex environment

(Ward & Spacey 2008; Konitou & Toole 2009). Furthermore, some women feel more comfortable talking in front of other women.

What support do women need?

### *Childcare information, support and provision*

Childcare is crucial if women are to engage in employment or training. For some women this may need to be culturally sensitive childcare (DWP 2007). Information about the relevant sources of financial support for childcare may be required (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010; Bunglawala 2008), as noted in the Quilliam report on Muslim women, “*an unfamiliarity with the tax credit system poses an additional obstacle to considering childcare*” (Dyke & James 2009, p.35). If there are some cultural preconceptions about using childcare, they suggest it may be useful to promote the benefits of childcare to the family and community as a whole. An appreciation of the issues that women with caring responsibilities have can be illustrated by adopting flexibility in terms of timing training during school hours, for example. Venues with on-site crèche facilities can be a useful site for women who are reluctant to leave their child in someone else’s care. Training projects can help women by providing financial assistance for childcare, signposting to childcare providers, providing advice about childcare and providing a link between support services (CLES 2009).

### *Mentors*

Mentors can be a useful support mechanism for women particularly if recruited from previous participants of training schemes who have successfully moved on to employment (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

### *Friendly staff from the local community*

Similarly, recruiting staff from within the community being served was a useful strategy in ESF projects as was drawing on personal experiences to mentor and advise participants (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010; see also Jones et al 2008; Konitou & Toole 2009). The friendliness of staff was important to ethnic minority groups in a study by the LSC (2007).

### *Peer encouragement*

Support groups set up to encourage women to attend informal learning sessions in a London-based project proved to have an impact beyond the sessions themselves, “*having new friends was nice to meet outside of the sessions and to bump into someone you know at the shops*” (Konitou & Toole 2009, p.7).

### *Personal adviser*

A personal adviser was vital to the success of the *Steps to Success* project (Gray 2008). The personal adviser met regularly with the participant and gave them encouragement and motivational support as well as providing advice. In particular, the role of the adviser in liaison with providers when participants had temporarily withdrawn from the programme was key in their return to the programme and minimising the impacts from that absence due to health problems, temporary work or extended trips abroad.

### *Staged entry to training with taster sessions*

Jumping straight in to employment training can be difficult for some women. They may need staged entry to training with taster sessions to help build their confidence before they commit themselves (DWP 2010). As Farrer in Booker and Boice (2007) caution: “*People may have to travel a long distance before hard outcomes (such as obtaining qualifications, enrolment on a training course, or finding employment) are even a possibility... Some individuals are completely isolated from systems and structures of support and may also be extremely wary of engaging with agencies or other organisations for help*” (2007, p.21). They note that ‘one stop shops’ located outside of formal agencies in communities where employment projects take place is an effective strategy.

### *English language skills /support*

As this review has noted, a barrier to training for women can be poor or no English language skills. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training is crucial for such women if they are to engage in training and/or employment (Ward & Spacey 2008; Dyke & James 2009; DWP 2010). Gray argued that, “*language support at*

*every stage of the project, in addition to occupationally focused or embedded ESOL provision, to enhance the reach of projects to beneficiaries with borderline ESOL skills”* was significant in the success of the *Steps to Success* project in Leicester (2008, p.22). Bilingual tutors may also prove useful.

#### *Having their qualifications recognised*

In addition, helping participants to have their skills and qualifications from outside the UK recognised in the UK is crucial (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

#### *IAG and progression routes*

Information, Advice and Guidance is a vital tool for supporting women to help them consider their options in learning, training and employment as part of their individual learning journey (Ward & Spacey 2008). Information about the available progression routes to further learning or employment including non-traditional fields of women’s employment are an important aspect of that support.

#### *Wider support*

A report by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies identified a wide range of support mechanisms employment training programmes need to have to tackle worklessness, some of which are mentioned above (2009). They also suggest counselling services, assistance with substance misuse, budgeting, housing support, health advice and support, help with understanding benefit entitlements, help with transport provision and costs, job brokerage services and community project work to encourage team work and confidence building.

What are the best ways to promote employment training to women?

#### *Word of mouth*

Research informing the *Dare to Dream* publication with learning providers discovered that learning opportunities for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali women were promoted in a number of ways with community outreach as the most used and most effective (Ward & Spacey 2008) whilst “*other strategies included working in*

*partnership and liaising with relevant people in the community; asking learners to spread the word, using national events such as International Women's Week to promote provision, taster sessions, summer schools"* (p.46). Informal networks of communication were also important in promoting opportunities and were recognised as such by providers. They included recommendations from friends, family, neighbours and other community members. Verbal recommendation can be powerful amongst women for whom English is not a first language.

### *Referrals*

Information and referrals to learning provision from local voluntary organisations, refugee support organisations, schools, public libraries, Children's Centres and health visitors are all important routes into learning for women.

### *Outreach*

Outreach could involve the use of outreach workers, voluntary or paid learning/training champions or a community engagement team (Ward & Spacey 2008), possibly using bilingual staff where there is a need or someone from the same ethnic minority group can be a useful outreach approach (DWP 2006). Bunglawala (2008) recommended targeted outreach, "*staffed by skilled teams (including British Muslim women) to engage British Muslim women, provide one-to-one job preparation, job-search and career advice, and tackle the multiple barriers to employment"* since they do not perceive services such as Jobcentre Plus cater for them. *Dare to Dream* found that women were reached through schools, nurseries, GP surgeries and baby clinics, places of worship, factories and community groups (Ward & Spacey 2008). The Women into Work Commission noted that *Women Like Us*<sup>80</sup> a specialist part time recruitment service for women use community centres, schools and Children's Centres to recruit local women into local jobs and training (2009). Similarly, successful ESF projects actively engaged women by approaching them at the school gates or locations such as charity shops (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010). Grant et al found that successful employment projects in Birmingham used existing knowledge within local community centres (2006).

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<sup>80</sup> <http://www.womenlikeus.org.uk/home.aspx>

### *Door-to-door*

The Quilliam Foundation also reiterates that outreach is the best way to engage South Asian women: *“those best placed to reach these women are community-based organisations that have the contacts, insight and capacity to do the outreach. Such outreach should involve making contact with the whole family, but must also engage the woman one-to-one”* (Dyke & James 2009, p.49). A door to door approach undertaken by women is advocated since a woman at home alone may be reluctant to open the door to a man.

### *Befriending schemes*

Door-to-door recruitment could be followed up by a befriending scheme involving women who have already been on a/the training course which would help develop their confidence at the same time.

### *Role models*

Role models from within a specific community can be a useful mechanism to illustrate to other women how, for example, they can go out to work and/or training and still be a good mother (Tackey et al 2006). As the Quilliam Foundation note, *“These role models should include successful business women... so that women aim high, but also local-level professionals from different sectors whom women may feel better able to relate to”* Dyke & James 2009, p.54 see also Konitou & Toole 2009).

### *Print advertising, posters, local media*

An evaluation of apprenticeships for young people in England<sup>81</sup> detailed some of the ways in which apprenticeships were promoted. They used leaflets, addressed adverts to females, visited local colleges, wrote features in women’s magazines, held stands at Asian lifestyle events, visited schools, spoke to community leaders and held open days targeted at specific groups. Posters in other languages were noted in an evaluation of ESF programmes (McNaughton Nicholls et al 2010).

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<sup>81</sup> Marangozov et al, 2009.

### *Market place events, open days*

'Market place' events can be a useful way to introduce local learning and employment opportunities although in *A Woman's Place*, the women who attended such an event were already part of a support group which was helping to develop their confidence. It may be unrealistic to expect women to attend such an event without a route in.

### *Conclusions*

This review has considered much of the more recent literature relating to women in the labour market and their attitudes to and involvement in employment and employment training in England. There is a danger in considering women in distinct groupings since this is not necessarily how women see themselves and in engaging in a deficit model whereby women are seen as the problem rather than consideration of the environmental and societal practices they are located within. Nevertheless there is much from the literature particularly in relation to South Asian women which is of transferability to all women. Where there is a paucity of information is in relation to women's sexuality and gender identity and the effects this may have on employment and training and research into women's job search strategies.

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## **Appendix 2: Key success factors to engage unemployed and economically inactive women in employment training**

The literature review of research into women and employment in the UK found the following were instrumental in engaging women in employment training (see Appendix 1).

The following list may not be applicable to all women but may be more useful with particular groups of women than others.

Training should be:

- Flexible;
- During family friendly hours;
- Local labour market specific;
- In fields where there are current labour shortages;
- Creative;
- Culturally appropriate;
- Gender sensitive;
- Personalised;
- Build confidence;
- Informative;
- Accessible.

Women prefer:

- Taster sessions;
- Work experience;
- Work trials;
- Voluntary placements;

- Practical support e.g. support with application forms and CVs;
- Women only groups;
- Women only spaces.

Training providers should have:

- Good links to employers;
- Good links to community and voluntary sector groups.

Training should be held:

- Locally e.g. community centres;
- In friendly locations e.g. Children's Centres, schools;
- Timed to suit the individual;
- Online i.e. making it easier to fit in.

Women need support in the form of:

- Childcare provision;
- Information about financial support for childcare;
- Bilingual tutors;
- Friendly staff;
- Mentors;
- Peer encouragement e.g. friends on the training;
- Family friendly timings of classes/training;
- Progression routes;
- Staged entry to training with taster sessions;
- English language skills learning opportunities;
- Having their skills recognised;
- Having their qualifications recognised.

Training for women is best promoted by:

- Word of mouth e.g. friends, family, community members;
- Outreach e.g. by outreach staff;

- Door-to-door;
- Befriending schemes e.g. involving women who have already done the training;
- Local media;
- Print advertising e.g. women's magazines, leaflets;
- Role models;
- Open days;
- Coffee sessions;
- Referrals;
- Posters in community languages.

## **Appendix 3: Methods**

### **Selection criteria for case studies**

Ten case study sites in England were selected which could include young women but were to focus on adults. It was stipulated that one from each of the ten regions was to be suggested including sites to investigate impacts and solutions to multiple equality characteristics.

Data provided by the Skills Funding Agency in December 2010 included the following:

- project organisation and name;
- project description;
- project funding;
- project contact name and details;
- number of female participants (at August 2010);
- number of total participants (at August 2010);
- percentage of female participants (at August 2010).

Contract performance reports undertaken by account managers did not contain any demographic information. Reports run in August 2010 for the Skills Funding Agency were cross-referenced against project information to give an indication of female participation. Not all projects had a description so the ESF Works website was also consulted. Some contracts finished in 2010.

English regions and number of ESF projects funded:

- East of England (38);
- East Midlands (57);
- London (129);
- South East (36);

- South West (26);
- Cornwall (13);
- North East (38);
- North West (93);
- West Midlands (72);
- Yorkshire and Humber (33).

On this basis, selection criteria included:

- at least one organisation from each region;
- consideration of percentage of female participants, highest in each region to the lowest;
- project still on-going to allow for interviews with project staff and female participants on site;
- a cross-section of types of provider i.e. college, third sector organisation, local authority;
- at least one to include young women;
- at least one to include a women-only group;
- at least one to include a partnership/consortium approach;
- at least one small programme (less than 50);
- at least one medium sized programme (between 51 and 149);
- at least one large programme (more than 150).

A list of three possible sites for each region was drawn up in order of preference in February 2011. Numbers 2 and 3 were to be approached if the first choice was unable to participate or unsuitable. Regional SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY contacts were contacted before individual approaches to case study sites were made to raise awareness of the research project.

## Initial list of potential case study sites

<i>Region</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> potential site</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> potential site</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> potential site</i>
East of England	39% (01/7/08 – 31/3/11)  TCHC (The Consultancy Home Counties Ltd) ESF Skills for Jobs (large). This company manage all of the East of England funding for Skills for Jobs (ESF funded programme).	36% (24/9/08 - 31/3/11)  Hertford Regional College. Youth East (Cambridgeshire) – re-engage young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (large).	35% (24/9/08 - 31/3/11)  Hertford Regional College. Youth East (Norfolk) – re-engage young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (large).
East Midlands	100% (1/9/08 - 31/3/11)  Nottingham Women's Centre. Women into Work (large).	50% (1/8/09-31/3/11)  Leicester College. Personal Best (small).	52% (1/9/08-31/3/11)  CNX Notts Ltd. Skills for Jobs delivered by partners (large).
London	Collage Arts – ESF Top Up – working with young people that are NEET. No participation data.	StreetVibes Youth Ltd. ESF Youth S02 Top Up (small). No participation data	Wandsworth London Borough Council. ESF Top Up. Ends 28/2/11. No participation data
South East	71% (1/6/08-31/3/11)  Surrey Care Trust. SCT AS01 (large).	57% (31/5/08-31/3/11)  Shaw Trust. AS02 Shaw Trust (medium).	50% (1/6/08-31/3/11)  Careers Enterprise Ltd. AS03 Careers Ent (large).

South West	25% (21/8/09-29/7/11) Weymouth College. Personal Best – gain level 1 qual. based on event volunteering (medium).	22% (19/10/09-31/7/11) North Wessex Training Ltd. Engagement of NEET in Swindon (small)	(Remaining project was 4% female).
Cornwall	68% (3/11/08-31/3/11) Cornwall Development Company Ltd. Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Community Grants Programme (CGP) (large).	59% (24/11/08-31/7/11) CC Education Services Ltd. HE Routeways (large).	57% (3/12/08-31/12/11) Involve (The Learning Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly) (large).
North East	100% (1/2/10-31/3/11) County Durham Council. ESOL (small).	100% (15/2/10-31/3/11) Middlesbrough Council. ESOL New approach support programme (small).	93% (15/2/10-31/3/11) Stockton Riverside College. ESOL New approach support programme (small).
North West	68% (2/6/08-31/3/11) The Women's Organisation (Trading) Ltd. ESF project 135 – Be enterprising (adult S07) (large).	67% (1/5/08-31/3/11) Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership. Retention in post 16 learning – Halton (small).	64% (1/5/08-31/3/11) Liverpool City Council. Liverpool Priority Sector Routeway (large).

West Midlands	47% (20/1/09-31/3/11) Birmingham Rathbone Society. WM Youth 02v3 NEET (large).	46%(1/6/08-31/3/11) Warwickshire County Council. Warwickshire CC WM-Adult-S01 engagement (large).	44% (1/8/08/31/3/11) North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. NWHC-WM-Youth-S02-NEET (medium).
Yorkshire and Humber	64% (1/3/09-30/6/11) Kirklees Metropolitan Council. Skills for Jobs Fund Manager W Yorkshire (large).	61% 1/3/09-30/6/11) Leeds City Council. Skills for Jobs fund manager W Yorkshire (large).	56% (1/7/08-31/3/11) Craven College. Adult Engagement Fund North Yorkshire (large).

The following case study sites were agreeable to inclusion and staff and learners able to meet with a researcher during February and March 2011. It was hoped to interview at least four staff at each site as well as undertaking a focus group with between six to eight learners. However, in light of the short time-scale of the project and the difficulties inherent in co-ordinating staff and learners' diaries in some instances, the number of staff and learners interviewed was fewer than anticipated, in some instances expectations were exceeded. In addition, some staff and learners were interviewed by telephone, at their convenience, if they were unable to meet with the researcher in person.

<i>Region</i>	<i>Case study</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Personnel/ Focus Group/Interviewees</i>
East of England	TCHC - Skills for Jobs	Large	Director of Public Sector Services/Project Manager Marketing Executive Skills for Jobs Adviser Partner organisation - Family Groups Chief

			Executive and project manager Partner practitioner Four female learners (including 3 telephone interviews)
East Midlands	Nottingham Women's Centre - Skills for Jobs	Large Women-only	Chief Executive Training Co-ordinator Learner Support worker Manager/employer Partner Organisation Focus group of 7 female learners
London	StreetVibes	Small Young women	Partnerships Manager IAG Worker Project Manager Employer One female learner (interview)
South East	Surrey Care Trust	Large	Deputy Chief Executive Programme Manager Development worker & teacher Partner organisation - Director of Holistic Harmonies Two female learners (telephone interviews)
South West	Weymouth College -	Medium	Adult Skills Curriculum Manager

	Personal Best		Course Tutor of the Personal Best Programme  Project Administrator  Focus group with 3 female learners
North East	Durham County Council Adult Learning ESOL	Small	Skills for Life Co-ordinator  Not possible to interview women learners
North West	The Women's Organisation - Be enterprising	Large  Women-only	Training co-ordinator /project manager/tutor  Outreach worker / business adviser  Focus group with 6 female learners
West Midlands	Birmingham Rathbone Society – ACCLR8 NEET	Large  Young women	Advice and Guidance Manager  ACCLR8 Programme Co-Ordinator  Focus group with 4 young female learners from the ACCLR8 programme
Yorkshire and Humber	Kirklees Metropolitan Council - Skills for Jobs	Large	Senior Funding & Investment Officer, Kirklees Council  Partner organisations -  Project Director, Kirklees Community Campus  Chief Executive Officer, DP-EVH  IAG Officer, DP-EVH  Focus group with 3 female learners and member of staff at DP-EVH

Cornwall	Cornwall Development Company - Gwellheans – Bal Maidens	Large  Women-only	Gwellheans Operations Manager  Gwellheans Programme Manager  Fund Officer Cornwall Development Agency  Focus group with 9 female participants
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### **Case study tools**

Research tools were put together for the team of case study researchers to ensure commonality in the format and content of the 10 case study reports required. They include interview schedules for a number of key project roles/personnel, a focus group schedule, a briefing sheet for ESF projects involved in this stage of the research, a background information sheet for the researchers and a case study proforma to aid the researchers when writing up the case studies.

### **Survey – online questionnaire**

During February, a questionnaire was designed by the research team which was hosted online using Cvent web survey software. The questionnaire remained online until Friday 11 March 2011 and was publicised by emails to individual projects and relevant networks including the Third Sector National Learning Alliance, Consortia + and the Third Sector European Network.

### **Consultation events**

A series of three consultation/partnership events were organised which were open to all providers, regardless of whether they were currently in receipt of ESF funding. These events were to consult on emerging findings from the research and to seek feedback from providers. The Third Sector National

Learning Alliance, Consortia + and the Third Sector European Network were all alerted to the events.

One event took place at NIACE's Women's Day Celebration event in London on March 7<sup>th</sup>, a second in Leicester at NIACE conference facilities on March 14<sup>th</sup> and a third at St George's Centre in Leeds on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2011.

## Appendix 4: Survey results

A questionnaire was compiled in February 2011 and converted into an online version using Cvent which was hosted online until Friday 11 March 2011. Approximately 630 organisations were contacted directly<sup>82</sup> and a total of 121 complete questionnaires were submitted. This represents a response rate of 19.2 per cent. This section considers the results of the survey.

Type of provider:

FE College	23
Third sector	22
Local authority department/service	16
Private company	15
Training organisation	14
Work based learning	10
IAG	8
Welfare to work	4
14-19	3
Unknown	3
Public sector	2
Learning provider partnership	1
Total	121

There was a good spread of respondents across sectors and types of organisation. The largest groups of respondents were employed by FE colleges, third sector organisations, local authorities, private companies, training organisations or work based learning providers.

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<sup>82</sup> 1,715 invitation emails were sent out to project contacts nationwide to elicit response.

The approximate proportion of women on the training programmes undertaken by the respondents ranged from 1 per cent to 100 per cent with the median percentage of women participants being 55.4 per cent (103 respondents provided a figure for this question).

Types of project:

14-19/NEET/young people	19
Response to Redundancy	11
Women only	10
Unemployed	9
Work based learning	9
Contractor/Sub-contractor	7
Employability skills/into employment	7
Train to Gain	6
Apprenticeships	6
Skills for Life	5
HE Routeways/HE Interventions/HE	5
Training to prepare for jobs	5
ESOL	4
Various	4
Qualifications	4
IAG	3
Skills for Jobs	3
Personal Best	2
Foundation learning	2
Endeavour	2
Pathways	2
Digital Archivist Inclusion Network	2
Vocational Routeways/Priority Routeways	2
Qualification comparison	2
Partnership Works	2

Capacity building	2
Additional learning support	1
Return to Work	1
Skills for Work	1
Here to Help	1
SkillWorks	1
T2G Flexibilities for London	1
Routes into Work	1
Community development	1

Similarly, there was a good spread of respondents across types of ESF programmes. The largest groups of respondents were employed by Further Education colleges, local authorities, private companies, training organisations or work based learning providers. In the above table 143 programme names or types are given as some respondents have worked at organisations in receipt of more than one ESF funding programme.

## **Key Success Factors**

### *Characteristics*

Section 1 of the questionnaire asked providers to consider the characteristics of employment training instrumental in engaging women based on findings from the evidence review undertaken as part of this project. Respondents could rate their agreement with the importance of the key success factors using a 5 point Likert scale. It was noted that the list may not be applicable to all women but may be more useful with particular groups of women than others.

Those characteristics included:

- flexible;
- during family friendly hours;
- local labour market specific;

- in fields where there are current labour shortages;
- creative;
- culturally appropriate;
- gender sensitive;
- personalised;
- build confidence;
- informative;
- for a wide range of occupations including those in non-traditional sectors;
- accessible.

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Flexible</i>	0	0	0	39	82
<i>During family friendly hours</i>	0	0	8	41	72
<i>Local labour market specific</i>	0	5	30	55	31
<i>In fields where there are shortages</i>	1	6	39	52	23
<i>Creative</i>	0	2	36	50	33
<i>Culturally appropriate</i>	0	4	30	59	28
<i>Gender sensitive</i>	1	7	45	45	23
<i>Personalised</i>	0	2	19	55	45
<i>Build confidence</i>	0	0	1	39	81
<i>Informative</i>	0	3	0	46	72
<i>For a wide range of occupations</i>	0	0	12	55	54
<i>Accessible</i>	0	0	2	29	90

Flexibility, confidence-building and accessibility were the most agreed with characteristics based on 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses.

Local labour market specific, in fields where there are current labour shortages, creative, culturally appropriate and gender sensitive received the greatest numbers of 'neither disagree nor agree' or 'disagree' responses suggesting that providers did not see these factors as quite as important as training being 'during family friendly hours' or 'informative' but were still in receipt of large numbers of respondents in agreement. One respondent asked *what is meant by family friendly hours as this would vary within different cultures? (Adult and Community Learning provider, North West)*, challenging our notion of what family-friendly really means.

Respondents were also asked to consider any additional factors that they saw as instrumental. Responses generally included factors which respondents were later asked to consider in the questionnaire such as the location of training, support mechanisms and promotion.

In terms of women engaging in training for occupations including those in non-traditional sectors, the following comments were significant indicating that more work needs to be done in encouraging women to think beyond stereotypical employment avenues:

*In our experience many women do not consider themselves to be capable of non-usual work roles and need their horizons broadening to consider other roles (Private Company, North East).*

*In the local area we have found that there has been a drastic decline in semi-skilled industry which would have traditionally employed high numbers of female workers. This change in industry can be fearful for some women and their families who may have worked in these industries all their lives. Although we agree that training should be family friendly we feel that challenging the old thinking about employment is part of the programme which is needed to address out-dated attitudes (Training company, West Midlands).*

### *Types of training*

In relation to the types of employment training women prefer. Respondents were asked to consider the following:

- taster sessions;
- work experience;
- work trials;
- voluntary placements;
- practical support e.g. with application forms and CVs;
- women only groups;
- women only spaces.

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Taster sessions</i>	0	7	47	44	23
<i>Work experience</i>	0	8	51	40	51
<i>Work trials</i>	0	6	63	38	14
<i>Voluntary placements</i>	1	9	54	44	13
<i>Practical support e.g. with CVs</i>	1	0	18	56	46
<i>Women only groups</i>	2	27	57	24	11
<i>Women only spaces</i>	2	29	66	14	10

Practical support, for example, with application forms and CVs was the most agreed with type of training women prefer (56 'agree' and 46 'strongly agree'). The most contentious statements were made in relation to 'women-only groups' and 'women only spaces' the latter of which received the largest number of 'neither disagree nor agree' and 'disagree' responses (66 and 29). Women-only training sessions were seen as a cultural preference by some groups but were also useful for women

lacking in confidence at the early stages of engagement but who might feel more comfortable in mixed groups once their confidence had grown:

*Our public job search areas are predominantly used by our male customers. Females have commented on feeling uncomfortable and want no communication with the men using the services. Female customers tend to book 1:1 advice sessions or attend group sessions often delivered by a female advisor. This is a generalisation but observations show the more confident, experienced and qualified are more able to access the public service alongside their male counterparts (Local authority learning and employment service, South East England).*

*Women only spaces and women only groups are crucial for many women especially at the early stages of their learning or following a 'disruption' in their lives (Women's training and support centre, East of England).*

*We have found that on occasion women-only groups work well as this tends to form supportive bonds however in general I feel it is important to retain links between the genders as this is necessary preparation for a work or mainstream learning environment (Charity and Social Enterprise, South West England).*

Voluntary placements and work trials were not as well liked as taster sessions and work experience. Reservations related to their ability to engage:

*Voluntary placements do not engage females as the mind-set is that they already 'work' within the home and to take non paid work only adds to a feeling of their output being of no value (FE College, East Midlands).*

*Voluntary placements are ok as long as they have a time limit on placed on them (FE College, South West England).*

An overwhelming sentiment that emerged from the comments was, of course, that it is very difficult to simplify about women's training preferences. This is a very individual preference:

*It is difficult to generalise in this way. We work with women from varying backgrounds, with various barriers to employment and from an age range of 18 - 50+. I believe these factors determine their learning preferences as opposed to their gender (FE College, London).*

*Everybody will be different. All training should be matched to the individual needs (Private work-based learning provider, North West).*

#### *Links providers need*

In terms of the links training providers need to have to engage women, respondents were asked to consider the following 2 statements:

- Good links to employers
- Good links to community and voluntary sector groups

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Good links to employers</i>	0	2	4	26	89
<i>Good links to community and voluntary sector groups</i>	1	1	6	46	67

Both these statements received tremendous levels of agreement with 'good links to employers' in receipt of 89 'strongly agrees' compared with 67 and 'good links to community and voluntary sector groups' with 46 'agrees' compared with 26.

Good links to employers are important because they *build credibility in the courses* (Welfare to Work, London).

One provider argued: *Voluntary and/or work experience opportunities with community and voluntary groups tend to be taken up more readily by women* (Voluntary Sector, North West).

The evidence review revealed that the location of employment training was important in engaging women. It was observed that local training in non-threatening environments was attractive to women as was training during times of the day women with caring responsibilities could attend. A more recent innovation has been on-line training and this option was put to providers.

### *Location of training*

Training should be held...

- locally for example, community centres;
- in friendly locations for example, Children's Centres, schools;
- timed to suit the individual;
- online for example, making it easier to fit in.

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Locally e.g. community centres</i>	1	2	13	44	62
<i>In friendly locations e.g. schools</i>	1	4	29	46	53
<i>Timed to suit the individual</i>	1	3	18	46	53
<i>Online i.e. making it easier to fit in</i>	2	20	46	40	13

Training held locally was by far the most important criteria identified (62 'strongly agree', 44 'agree') as was it being held in friendly locations such as Children's Centres and schools (46 'agree') and timed to suit the individual (46 'agree').

However, online employment training was more contentious. Providers expressed concerns about availability of and access to ICT, isolation, women with low literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and appropriateness for skills training as the following comments illustrate:

*On-line training may suit those who are confident and IT literate however attending a training course with others in a group often has other benefits in addition to accreditation, the social aspect of meeting new people and mixing in a group helps to build confidence and a sense of achievement too. On-line training keeps individuals isolated and does not offer an insight into being in a professional environment (Community and Enterprise Development, West Midlands)*

*Many of our learners may not have access to additional ICT facilities outside of learning provision. They may also have issues with housing and we have found a great amount of instability with housing. Many of our learners have had several moves from one form of temporary accommodation or another. This would impact greatly on the ability to access ICT and online learning (Community Organisation, London).*

*Online is very good for some things - knowledge based, but useless for skills training (Training Association, East Midlands).*

*From our experience women prefer face to face support and assistance to engage in training and finding of jobs (Voluntary Sector, London).*

Alternatively, it was felt that online training could form one useful component of employment training with online resources available during training sessions with support from staff.

One respondent challenged the notion of using family friendly locations and times and suggested that it was more useful to pay for childcare to enable women to participate:

*I think it is important that learning and appointments are separate from family responsibilities if possible. This gives parents a freedom, even if only for an hour, to focus on themselves and their own goals. Therefore paying for childcare is more important and practical than adjusting to family friendly centres or times (Housing Association and Welfare to Work provider, East Midlands).*

### *Forms of support*

To 'stay the course' and for training providers to retain women learners, a number of support mechanisms were put to providers. These took the form of structural support such as childcare, support from staff and friends and support for women to progress into further training and employment.

Women need support in the form of...

- childcare provision;
- information about financial support for childcare;
- bilingual tutors;
- friendly staff;
- mentors;
- peer encouragement e.g. friends on the training;
- family friendly timings of classes/training;
- progression routes;
- information, Advice and Guidance (IAG);
- staged entry to training with taster sessions;
- English language skills learning opportunities;
- having their skills recognised;
- having their qualifications recognised.

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Childcare provision</i>	0	0	12	48	61
<i>Information about financial support for childcare</i>	0	0	13	44	64
<i>Bilingual tutors</i>	6	13	64	29	13
<i>Friendly staff</i>	1	0	7	35	78
<i>Mentors</i>	0	0	16	67	38
<i>Peer encouragement e.g. friends on the training</i>	1	3	20	62	35
<i>Family friendly timings of classes/training</i>	1	0	3	60	55
<i>Progression routes</i>	0	0	8	52	76
<i>Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)</i>	0	0	1	44	76
<i>Staged entry to training with taster sessions</i>	0	3	31	56	31
<i>English language skills learning opportunities</i>	9	3	28	58	32
<i>Having their skills recognised</i>	0	0	4	50	67
<i>Having their qualifications recognised</i>	0	1	6	50	64

Friendly staff, progression routes and IAG were the most strongly favoured support mechanisms for women (78, 76 and 76 'strongly agree', respectively) as were mentors, peer encouragement and family friendly timings of classes/training (67, 62 and 60 'agree', respectively).

Bilingual tutors were questionable however, 64 respondents 'neither disagree nor agree' and 13 'disagree' arguing that this would vary according to the location of training and cohort of women. Lack of English could be supported by co-tutoring as one respondent suggested.

Obviously, as a number of respondents pointed out, the factors mentioned above may be applicable to both men and women.

### *Recruitment*

A range of recruitment methods had been identified in the research literature as suitable ways to engage women in employment training. Providers were asked to consider the following 11 approaches:

Training for women is best promoted by...

- word of mouth example, friends, family, community members;
- outreach example, by outreach staff;
- door-to-door;
- befriending schemes example, involving women who have already done the training;
- local media;
- print advertising for example, women's magazines, leaflets;
- role models;
- open days;
- coffee sessions;
- referrals;
- posters in community languages.

	<i>strongly disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither disagree nor agree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>strongly agree</i>
<i>Word of mouth example, friends, family</i>	1	1	7	49	63
<i>Outreach example, by outreach staff</i>	0	1	17	59	44
<i>Door-to-door</i>	8	28	52	22	11
<i>Befriending schemes</i>	2	3	21	64	31
<i>Local media</i>	0	3	34	63	21
<i>Print advertising example, leaflets</i>	0	7	38	59	17
<i>Role models</i>	0	0	18	63	40
<i>Open days</i>	1	1	17	74	28
<i>Coffee sessions</i>	1	3	27	67	23
<i>Referrals</i>	0	1	12	69	39
<i>Posters in community languages</i>	2	2	37	57	23

Word of mouth was the most 'strongly agreed' with recruitment method for women (63):

*In our experience a positive reputation and 'word of mouth' advertising for a course is by far the most effective means of communicating the message (Charity, South East England).*

Referrals and role models were also well thought of (39, 40 'strongly agree' respectively) as were open days (74 'agree'), coffee sessions (67 'agree'), befriending schemes (64 'agree') and use of local media (63 'agree').

However, recruitment of women 'door-to-door' was the most disliked method (2 'neither disagree nor agree', 28 'disagree' and 8 'strongly disagree), possibly because of security concerns:

*Door to door will not work as women are very security aware now and will often not engage in discussions with anyone they do not know. The power of referral is still the best (FE College, East Midlands).*

*We have tried door to door and did not receive a brilliant response. Word of mouth is very powerful (FE College, South West).*

There was also some ambivalence about posters in community languages. One respondent felt that this was untenable in their location:

*As Rochdale has over 30 different languages spoken on just one estate in the borough, it would be impossible to have posters in all different languages (Local authority, North West).*

While print advertising in the form of leaflets might be of more relevance to partners than local women:

*In our experience, it is other professionals who find leaflets useful background information. Learners almost always attend our provision via referral, word of mouth or direct contact through outreach workers who know the geographical area. (Charity, South East).*

## **Barriers**

The second section of the questionnaire related to barriers to engaging women in employment and training. A list of 10 barriers identified in the research literature was given. Respondents were asked to contribute any additional barriers they have identified in their work with women learners/trainees.

The list included:

- lack of fluency in English;
- lack of affordable childcare;
- lack of jobs with family friendly hours;
- limiting job seeking strategies example, not knowing where to look for jobs or training opportunities;
- location of training or employment;
- lack of confidence;
- lack of support example, from family;
- lack of qualifications i.e. low-level or out-dated experience;
- lack of a route in i.e. some women may need 'soft skills' development such as communication skills before they can think about employment training;
- discrimination i.e. perceptions of employers and employees;
- negative attitudes about training and employment.

The responses to this answer were free text and analysed by a researcher. A total of 82 responses were made with 136 barriers specified. The following 10 already appeared in the list above:

<i>Lack of confidence/ambition/aspirations and fear</i>	16
<i>Location of training/employment/poor transport links/cost</i>	13
<i>Lack of support from family</i>	12
<i>Lack of affordable childcare/school holiday cover</i>	8
<i>Low personal investment in programme/low motivation</i>	7
<i>Lack of information/IAG</i>	7
<i>Lack of qualifications/ out-dated, low or no qualifications and experience</i>	7
<i>Lack of basic skills/ literacy/numeracy/ICT/language</i>	6
<i>Perceptions of training providers/employers</i>	2
<i>Not job/training ready</i>	3

Attitudinal barriers including low confidence were identified by the largest number of respondents preventing women from engagement with learning, training and employment. This may have affected a woman's belief in herself and her subsequent ambitions and aspirations:

*Lack of ambition (this is confidence really and this is the biggest barrier)* (Housing Association and Welfare to Work provider, East Midlands).

Location of training opportunities could be a barrier particularly if public transport links were poor and/or women could not afford transport costs:

*In rural areas transport links, particularly with bus routes being significantly reduced and also the cost of transport* (Jobs enterprise and training, West Midlands).

Lack of family support was seen as a barrier to women engaging in employment and training. However, in some instances it was felt that lack of support from family members extended to discouragement and prevention:

*Lack of support from family can be strengthened to include active discouragement by male partners* (Training provider, London).

*This goes beyond lack of support and in some cases is outright bullying and emotional abuse from extended family, partners and even children that stops women fulfilling their potential* (Local authority, South East England).

A further 11 barriers were suggested as described in the table below:

<i>Social problems/children's anti-social behaviour/gang violence/alcohol and drug abuse/homelessness/domestic violence</i>	9
<i>Benefit trap</i>	8
<i>Financial problems/ training too expensive/can't afford to pay/low pay</i>	8
<i>Male environment/tutors/male-dominated workforce</i>	6
<i>Lack of appropriate opportunities</i>	6
<i>Poor health including mental health</i>	5
<i>Cultural beliefs</i>	5
<i>Time management /balancing home and training/ time constraints</i>	3
<i>Negative school experiences</i>	3
<i>Other caring responsibilities</i>	1
<i>Lack of role models</i>	1

The personal circumstances of some women affect their ability to engage in training. Providers detailed situations such as children involved in anti-social behaviour, homelessness, domestic violence, gang violence and alcohol and drug abuse.

The 'benefit trap' or the 'unemployment trap' whereby the net income difference between low-paid work and unemployment benefits is less than work related costs, discouraging movement into work, was cited as a barrier by 8 providers:

*Lone parents believe that they are better off on benefits than working - caught in a benefit trap (FE College, London).*

Six providers highlighted issues specific to gender: that some women felt uncomfortable about accessing employment training in a male-dominated workplace or setting:

*Male environments. Male tutors. Especially relevant with dealing with females who are socially excluded (Local authority adult and community learning service, East Midlands).*

*Training environment may appear male-dominated or more suited to males in terms of location (example, back of trading estate with poor footpaths and street lighting) and training venue aesthetics (Company and charity, East Midlands).*

*Women, especially Lesbian women, wanting to train in male orientated professions such as construction or plumbing etc., often feel 'intimidated' by the male bias of training options (FE College, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

### **Successful strategies to address barriers**

Ninety two respondents suggested 138 strategies they had used to address these barriers which include:

<i>Environment: safe/community/local/relaxed</i>	13
<i>Childcare provision and/or funding</i>	8
<i>Financial incentives/grants</i>	8
<i>Family friendly timings of training</i>	6
<i>Information, Advice and Guidance</i>	6
<i>Partnership working</i>	5
<i>Whole family approach</i>	5
<i>Progression opportunities into further learning or employment</i>	5
<i>One to one support/intensive support/regular meetings</i>	5
<i>Provision responds to learner need</i>	5
<i>Visits to employers/employer engagement/work placements</i>	4
<i>Open days</i>	4
<i>Confidence building/challenging deep rooted negative beliefs</i>	4
<i>Goal setting/helping women understand what they want</i>	4

<i>Women only groups/space/staff</i>	4
<i>Friendly staff/staff who understand the barriers/staff continuity/ previous learners/staff are community-based</i>	4
<i>Skills for Life</i>	3
<i>Word of mouth</i>	3
<i>Helping women identify the skills they already have</i>	3
<i>Building trust</i>	3
<i>Holistic approach</i>	3
<i>First step engagement</i>	3
<i>Flexible programmes</i>	3
<i>Funding for travel</i>	3
<i>Mentoring</i>	2
<i>Referrals</i>	2
<i>Providing information</i>	2
<i>Community champions/literacy champions</i>	2
<i>Short courses/tasters</i>	2
<i>Staff development/staff up to date</i>	2
<i>Advertising/media</i>	2
<i>Job readiness programmes/learning readiness</i>	2
<i>Home visits/door-to-door recruitment</i>	2
<i>Buddy systems/peer support</i>	2
<i>Discussion groups</i>	1
<i>Face to face delivery</i>	1
<i>Role models</i>	1
<i>Outreach workers</i>	1
<i>Drop-in sessions</i>	1
<i>Facilitate introductions</i>	1
<i>Informal discussions</i>	1
<i>Family learning/wider family learning</i>	1
<i>Small groups</i>	1

Many respondents detailed more than one approach to help women overcome barriers to engagement in training. Holding training in an appropriate environment and location was a popular approach; a safe, accessible, convenient, welcoming and trusted location. This might also include taking the learning to where the women are situated:

*Deliver training in venues which are viewed as safe by women and their families* (Training company, London).

*Go to the safe houses and deliver in-house* (Training company, South East).

Assisting women in finding childcare provision, accessing funding for childcare or providing crèche facilities was another popular strategy. This was also related to arranging training at family friendly times for women with older children who attend school during the day and need to collect them at the end of the school day:

*Arranging crèches which fit in with training* (Training Consortium, South East).

*Flexible personalised training and support with childcare facilities, utilising female staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them* (Private company, London).

*Trying to design courses that run between 10am & 2.30pm so that women are able to drop off and collect children from childcare facilities. Although evening training programmes may be appropriate it would not reflect the demands of the workplace so we have avoided offering evening provision for these groups* (Specialist Training Provider, North West).

Financial incentives or grants to undertake learning/training were used by 8 providers:

*Using powerful emotional incentives to attract people onto the course e.g. laptops* (Voluntary sector organisation, London).

Providers were asked to consider multiple barriers to engaging in employment and training such as ill health, disability, sexuality, age, class, family responsibilities or prior learning and employment experience. One hundred and three agreed that multiple equality characteristics did present a barrier to most women.

Yes	103
No	18

Of those that are the most significant to women learners the following table reveals providers' responses which were free text and have been categorised manually as follows:

<i>Family responsibilities</i>	22
<i>Family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences</i>	12
<i>Prior learning and employment experiences</i>	5
<i>Family responsibilities and financial barriers</i>	3
<i>Family responsibilities and lack of confidence</i>	4
<i>All</i>	4
<i>Lack of confidence</i>	3
<i>Family responsibilities and lack of experience of training, employment and related services</i>	2
<i>Family responsibilities and cultural issues</i>	2
<i>Family responsibilities and ill-health including mental health</i>	2
<i>Family responsibilities and age</i>	2
<i>Age</i>	2
<i>Age and family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences</i>	2
<i>Prior learning and employment experiences and lack of experience of training, employment and related services</i>	2
<i>Family responsibilities and benefit trap</i>	1

<i>Family responsibilities and lack of experience of training, employment and related services and lack of confidence</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and disability</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and sexuality</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and ill-health including mental health and age</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and lack of experience of training, employment and related services and lack of confidence and uncertainty about the future</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and low/out-dated/no skills and lack of experience of training, employment and related services and transport issues</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences and pressure from JCP</i>	1
<i>Family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences and history of unemployment</i>	1
<i>Lack of experience of training, employment and related services and negative attitudes</i>	1
<i>Lack of experience of training, employment and related services and low/out-dated/no skills and history of unemployment and lone parent</i>	1
<i>Lack of confidence and abuse</i>	1
<i>Lack of experience of training, employment and related services</i>	1
<i>Ill-health including mental health</i>	1
<i>Ill-health including mental health and family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences</i>	1
<i>Ill-health including mental health and prior learning and employment experiences</i>	1
<i>Ill-health including mental health and age and disability</i>	1
<i>Age and ill-health including mental health</i>	1
<i>Language barriers and lack of confidence and low/out-dated/no skills and family responsibilities and not in benefits system</i>	1
<i>Class</i>	1
<i>Class and family responsibilities and prior learning and employment experiences</i>	1
<i>Negative attitudes</i>	1
<i>Inflexibility of providers</i>	1

<i>Cultural issues and lack of confidence and low aspirations and lack of basic skills and lack of awareness of opportunities and few women-only opportunities</i>	1
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Family responsibilities alone and in conjunction with another barrier were cited in 22 of 38 possible combinations. Prior learning and employment experiences were also considered alone and in conjunction with 7 other combinations as particularly restrictive for women wishing to engage in training and learning.

Eighty two respondents supplied information as to how they deal with multiple barriers in their recruitment practices.

<i>Family friendly timings of training/ interviews</i>	14
<i>Working in partnership e.g. JCP/referrals</i>	13
<i>Childcare provision/support for childcare</i>	10
<i>Inclusive environment</i>	9
<i>IAG/staff recruited who can provide IAG</i>	7
<i>Tailoring training</i>	7
<i>Flexible delivery of programmes</i>	7
<i>One to one support/intensive support/regular meetings</i>	6
<i>Promotion of benefits of training/no prior qualifications needed</i>	6
<i>Experienced staff from/reflective of local community</i>	5
<i>Funding for travel/expenses</i>	4
<i>Work with employers</i>	4
<i>Word of mouth</i>	4
<i>Equality within recruitment practices</i>	3
<i>Equal opportunities policies and procedures</i>	3
<i>Building up trust within the community and the staff</i>	3
<i>Targeting underrepresented groups or specific groups</i>	3
<i>Outreach</i>	3
<i>Awareness raising/confidence raising</i>	3

<i>Variety of recruitment methods</i>	2
<i>Role models/diversity in advertising</i>	2
<i>Role models</i>	1
<i>Peer recruitment</i>	1
<i>Undertaking needs analysis of beneficiaries</i>	1
<i>Door knocking</i>	1
<i>Development workers</i>	1
<i>Frontline staff involved in engagement and referral</i>	1

Family friendly timings of training with some flexibility in delivery were important strategies as was providing women with information or support about where best to obtain childcare. Working in partnership emerged as a useful tool for providers to signpost women to appropriate support mechanisms:

*By developing provision in partnership with 3rd sector organisations to provide accessible opportunities in local community venues with childcare support and additional support from the host community organisation. Partners are directly involved in promoting opportunities locally (FE College, South East).*

*The teams I work with always consider the whole person. We need to put in place interventions that will deal with the barriers. E.g. the mentor who will listen, the tutor who can signpost to further assistance on any barrier, we have a comprehensive and well established network of organisations in Portsmouth. Using this network does help people overcome their barriers (Work-based learning provider, North East)*

Recruitment practices were therefore considered in terms of marketing practices, for example, word of mouth, outreach, peer recruitment, targeting specific groups and practical mechanisms and tools providers could put into place which would be attractive to women such as holding training in environments women feel comfortable attending, staff who are able to deliver IAG, tailoring training to meet women's needs and flexibility in terms of delivery.

One hundred and eleven respondents supplied information as to how they responded to multiple barriers in their learning practices giving 166 suggestions.

<i>Flexible</i>	19
<i>Family friendly timings of training</i>	16
<i>Confidence building</i>	7
<i>Environment: safe/community/local/relaxed</i>	7
<i>Childcare provision and/or funding</i>	7
<i>Other support</i>	6
<i>Variety of opportunities</i>	6
<i>Tailored provision</i>	6
<i>Information, Advice and Guidance</i>	5
<i>Mentoring/one to one</i>	5
<i>ILP</i>	4
<i>Partnership working</i>	4
<i>Transport costs</i>	2
<i>Additional Learning Support</i>	2
<i>Practical advice e.g.CV writing, job search and applications</i>	2
<i>Working with employers</i>	2
<i>Work experience</i>	2
<i>Short courses/taster sessions</i>	2
<i>Peer support</i>	1
<i>Women-only courses</i>	1
<i>Financial incentives/grants</i>	1
<i>E-learning</i>	1
<i>Experienced female staff</i>	1
<i>Contextualising learning</i>	1
<i>Grouping students in accordance with their needs</i>	1
<i>Small groups</i>	1

Again, flexibility and family friendly timings of training were considered important ways for providers to support women once they are engaged. Building women's confidence as they undertake training also emerged as a useful learning support practice:

*Taken away classrooms and made learning accessible and flexible and modular with many opportunities to achieve and build confidence, especially for someone who has been out of training for many years or who has been made redundant, with self-esteem badly in need of rebuilding* (Training organisation, East Midlands).

Seventy two of 121 respondents detailed 109 ways they respond to multiple barriers in their support practices.

<i>Support from other programme staff e.g. tutor, coach, outreach worker, counsellor</i>	30
<i>Mentoring</i>	24
<i>Information, Advice and Guidance</i>	13
<i>Role models/learner advocates/learning ambassadors/peer support/literacy champions</i>	13
<i>One to one tutorials/meetings</i>	5
<i>Working with partners/families/employers</i>	5
<i>Progression pathways</i>	4
<i>Volunteer supporters</i>	4
<i>Exit interview/mid-term reviews</i>	3
<i>Childcare provision and/or funding</i>	3
<i>Access to support worker</i>	2
<i>Support once programmes has finished</i>	2
<i>Additional Learning Support</i>	1

Staff support emerged as the most popular practice whether from the tutor, counsellor, coach or outreach worker (30) and from mentors (24):

*The outreach team provide on-going support by telephone or informal meetings, perhaps in a local coffee shop. Some of our learners will undertake numerous short courses over a period of up to perhaps 2-4 years before they have the confidence to take the next step into formal learning or employment (FE College, London).*

*All customers are designated a one-to-one Training and Employment Coach who carries out a detailed needs assessment and works with the customer to develop a personalised goals and action plan through on-going information, advice and guidance. This coach remains with the individual throughout the intervention. The coaches access support from partner organisations to remove the barriers which prevent the individual from advancing academically (Training organisation, West Midlands).*

*We have an onsite counsellor and support provided by our Student Services department. Also, our staff have a wealth of experience when supporting individuals with these barriers (FE College, West Midlands).*

*Mentoring and friendly and responsive staff recognising issues regarding children's illness and support needed (Training company, London).*

Support from other learners and from other women in the community such as role models, learner advocates, learning ambassadors, peer support and literacy champions were also well advocated:

*Rather than mentors, who can sometimes intimidate women, we have found that previous students acting as advocates and establishing a good rapport between the groups can help as they seem to respond well to peer support (FE College, Yorkshire and Humber).*

*Peer mentoring was encouraged, successful women from the same ethnic backgrounds of the learners were brought in to deliver speeches at seminars we held and encourage the women to utilise their skills to become economically inactive as they do not necessarily have to have a 9-5 job to achieve this (Learning consortium, West Midlands).*

## Successful retention strategies

Seventy eight of 121 respondents detailed 175 strategies they use to support the women to 'stay the course' or learner retention strategies:

<i>Financial information and support – advice, referrals, benefits, practical experience, small grants, clothes for interview, incentives, resources</i>	26
<i>Childcare support – costs, provision, advice, signposting</i>	22
<i>Working with other agencies, signposting, referring, coming in for talks and sessions, delivering with them e.g. CAB</i>	22
<i>Travel costs - provision, advice, signposting, providing transport</i>	17
<i>Learning offer itself – practical employability skills, confidence building, small groups, local, flexibility</i>	15
<i>Encouragement and support including one-to-one support</i>	12
<i>Financial literacy – course, advice</i>	8
<i>Information &amp; support for drug or alcohol abuse</i>	8
<i>Information, Advice and Guidance</i>	7
<i>Friendly staff/non-judgemental/experienced/tutor support</i>	7
<i>Access to counselling and other onsite support services</i>	7
<i>Communication/contact during and after the programme</i>	7
<i>Skills for Life support</i>	6
<i>Encouraging personal responsibility</i>	4
<i>Mentors</i>	4
<i>Fees remission</i>	2
<i>Hand holding service</i>	1

Much of this related to information, advice and signposting to organisations specialised in providing such information about financial support (26) for the women whilst they engaged in training – for travel (17) or childcare costs (22), for example. However, the learning/training itself and its flexibility was seen as a means of retention as it helped build women’s confidence in a safe environment (15) as well as the encouragement and support women receive from providers:

Courses delivered by our organisation are short in duration and barriers are identified and addressed prior to attendance. Arrangements are made to provide transport and childcare to enable access to the learning venue. Follow up support, signposting and possible referral is provided as a matter of course (Welfare to Work, South West).

### **Partnership working**

Seventy seven respondents stated that they worked in partnership with other organisations /networks in order to recruit women to their provision.

Yes	77
No	44

This question was open ended and so the 72 respondents who detailed who they worked with are best interpreted by considering the range of partners as respondents worked with which could be between one and 30 partners. The following table reveals the range of partners with most in the third sector (35), Jobcentre Plus (23), local authority departments and services (23) and training providers (18). Organisations providing IAG were popular partners (14) as were Children’s Centres (14).

<i>Voluntary and community organisations/networks</i>	35
<i>Job Centre Plus including Lone Parent Advisors</i>	23
<i>Local authority including community learning, social care, teenage pregnancy unit, leaving care, family intervention team, youth offending team,</i>	23
<i>Training provider/company/organisation</i>	18
<i>Sure Start Children's Centres</i>	14
<i>Connexions/Next Step</i>	14
<i>Colleges</i>	12
<i>NHS/health/GP including mental health</i>	12
<i>Women's groups/organisations</i>	11
<i>Schools including school support workers</i>	10
<i>Employment/training/learning/business networks/partnerships</i>	10
<i>Other</i>	9
<i>Other charitable organisations e.g. Job Mates, Groundwork, Women in Manual Trades, Community First, YMCA,</i>	9
<i>Probation/Offenders e.g. Humbercare</i>	9
<i>Employers/businesses</i>	6
<i>Other learning providers e.g. WEA, Learn Direct, Unionlearn</i>	6
<i>Housing organisations/departments/associations</i>	5
<i>Women's refuges</i>	4
<i>Parenting/family organisations</i>	4
<i>DWP, Skills Funding Agency</i>	4
<i>Remploy, Landau</i>	3
<i>CAB and similar</i>	2
<i>Shaw Trust</i>	2
<i>Business support – Business Link, Chamber of Commerce</i>	2
<i>Disability networks</i>	2
<i>Steps to Work</i>	1
<i>A4E Pathways</i>	1
<i>Sector Skills Council</i>	1
<i>Local football club</i>	1

<i>Racial Equality Council</i>	1
<i>Neighbourhood Management</i>	1
<i>Religious organisations</i>	1

Sixty six respondents detailed how long they had worked in partnership. This ranged from 6 months to 30 years with the median length of time as 8 years (536 divided by 76).

Sixty five respondents detailed how they work in partnership. The most popular ways were as part of a referral process, referring women to/from partners' provision (29) and working together with partners on projects, project tenders and delivery (28).

<i>Referral, to and from, cross-referral, referral agents</i>	29
<i>Project working/putting bids together/putting courses on together/contractually/planning</i>	28
<i>In a network or partnership or forum</i>	16
<i>Information sharing/sharing best practice</i>	13
<i>Meetings</i>	12
<i>Communication/emails/website</i>	10
<i>Sharing resources/venues/staff</i>	7
<i>Visits</i>	3
<i>Support packages/mechanisms</i>	3
<i>Fundraising</i>	1
<i>Promotion</i>	1

Sixty one respondents detailed 87 challenges involved in partnership working. Funding could be one problematic aspect of working together, for example, when funding ended or criteria are too restrictive and organisations are unable to apply.

<i>Funding/inflexibility/aligning/criteria/ending/budget cuts</i>	25
<i>Limitations on offer/availability/meeting needs/ineligibility</i>	10
<i>Cultural issues/perceptions/barriers</i>	7
<i>Competitive market/between providers</i>	6
<i>Pressures to achieve numbers/contractual obligations/time limits</i>	5
<i>Clashing agendas/conflict of purpose/priorities</i>	5
<i>Information sharing/data protection</i>	4
<i>Retention</i>	4
<i>Continuity in staff</i>	4
<i>Communication</i>	4
<i>Duplication</i>	3
<i>Keeping up to date</i>	2
<i>Lack of experienced staff</i>	2
<i>Reach</i>	1
<i>Building up trust</i>	1
<i>Capacity</i>	1
<i>Getting other partners to work together</i>	1
<i>Referrals from other agencies</i>	1
<i>Bureaucracy</i>	1

Sixty one respondents detailed 108 benefits involved in partnership working:

<i>Access to more/different groups of women/reaching the 'hard to reach'</i>	23
<i>Better service/outcomes/achievements/offer</i>	19
<i>Developing community links/understanding/trust</i>	10
<i>More/better support for women</i>	9
<i>Sharing good practice/ideas/information/experience</i>	8
<i>Progression opportunities</i>	8
<i>Combining/pooling resources/increase capacity</i>	7
<i>Access expertise/sharing expertise/specialist help</i>	7

<i>Avoid duplication of provision</i>	5
<i>Joint delivery</i>	4
<i>Enhanced reputation</i>	3
<i>More funding/income</i>	3
<i>Supports the third sector</i>	1
<i>Meets organisational objectives</i>	1

Skills Funding Agency  
Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
T 0845 377 5000  
F 024 7682 3675  
[www.bis.gov.uk/skillsfundingagency](http://www.bis.gov.uk/skillsfundingagency)

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