

Engaging unemployed women in ESF-funded training: successful approaches and case studies

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Of interest to providers delivering to people with out work



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1) Background

In July 2010, a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) report¹ found that rates for engaging women in ESF-funded training were particularly low in Priority 1² in comparison to the targets set (35 per cent against a target of 51 per cent). The same 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 effective strategies to support them would help achieve gender participation targets.

The Skills Funding Agency commissioned the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to undertake a project *Engaging unemployed women in ESF-funded training* to build on the DWP research by identifying, catalysing and disseminating a core of good practice in successfully engaging unemployed women in ESF programmes. This report summarises the findings for providers in order to inform practice in engaging and supporting women to achieve and progress in pre-employment training.

¹ 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>

² Priority 1 of the 2007-2013 England ESF programme - 'extending employment opportunities' supports projects to tackle the barriers to work faced by unemployed and disadvantaged groups.

2) Methods

The project used the following methods to research barriers to women's participation and to explore successful strategies to address these barriers.

Desk research

A literature review focussing on publications since 2005 identified barriers and examples of successful responses and strategies for engaging unemployed and economically inactive women. The findings were used to design the questionnaire and case study frameworks, 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 in March 2011. 121 complete questionnaires were submitted; a response rate of 19.2 per cent.

Consultation and engagement events

We organised three events for a range of providers from different sectors to share experience and effective practice and facilitate links between them.

Case studies

We researched and produced ten case studies of good practice. The case studies were selected to represent work with diverse groups, including women experiencing multiple disadvantages, programmes working with both mixed and women only cohorts, and a regional spread to ensure that geographical differences were taken into account. Each case study drew upon documentary data and primary data collected through interviews with strategic and operational staff, employers where appropriate, and discussions with women learners.

The report structure

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 living with multiple challenges, 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 following sections set out the findings from the research that may be adopted by other projects to enhance their approaches to recruiting and supporting women in ESF funded training.

- *Firm foundations* sets out the factors that inform and underpin work to engage women.
- *Barriers to participation* describes the barriers to participation, persistence and success that women might face.
- *Strategies* provides examples of successful strategies for engaging women and supporting them to success solutions.
- The *Checklist* is a quick reference summary of the key messages.

3) Firm Foundations

Taking account of the following factors will enhance success in engaging women and supporting them to succeed and progress.

Women are not a homogeneous group

It is important to recognise that women's individual circumstances, experiences of learning, attitudes, abilities, aspirations and confidence levels are different. This means that it is imperative that providers do not make assumptions about the interests or support needs of potential women recruits. They need to research what these are then develop customised approaches to respond.

Positive/deficit view

It is important to stress that many women are successful in learning and work, and many more have immense potential which, for diverse reasons, has not been realised. It is important to focus on the positive aspects of what can be achieved. This is because a disproportionate emphasis on disadvantage and barriers can produce deficit, limiting perspectives on women's potential.

Multiple disadvantage

Women furthest from learning, pre-employment training and work often experience multiple factors that together pose considerable challenges to accessing, sustaining and progressing in learning and work. Personalised approaches are usually most effective to support these women.

Support for independence

Personalised support enables women to succeed. It 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 then taper as the learning journey progresses. This can be a lengthy journey for some women, especially those experiencing multiple disadvantages.

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. Adults progress at different rates in different areas and progression is not always linear. This is especially true for women who have to interrupt their learning journey because of family pressures or the effects of disadvantage.

Needs and approaches differ by gender

The issues presented in this report may, of course, also affect men. The important factor 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.

4) Barriers to participation

This section considers the barriers that women commonly face to entering learning, pre-employment training and progressing to employment.

The factors affecting participation in learning and work may include age, ethnicity, disability, class and sexuality. Other considerations are educational history and qualifications, long- term unemployment, work experience, lack of fluency in English, poverty, caring responsibilities, 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. The challenges for both individual women and providers intensify where their circumstances take in several of these issues.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal and psychological barriers to learning can be complex and deep rooted. They can relate to personal beliefs and confidence levels and/or the attitudes of families, peers and communities. This can explain why some women remain disengaged even when help with practical issues is offered.

Confidence and self esteem

Lack of confidence, often reinforced by poor self-esteem, is universally cited as the most significant barrier to women of all ages accessing and progressing in learning and work. They often don't consider learning or training opportunities because low confidence limits their belief in their ability to learn and succeed and lowers their aspirations. Confidence levels vary, with low confidence particularly acute for women who experience one or more of the following:

- multiple disadvantage and life challenges;
- depression;
- poor mental health;
- negative experiences of education;
- have never worked;
- have been out of the labour market for some time.

“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).

Culture, family and peer pressure

Cultural expectations can shape and reinforce women’s attitudes to learning and work. Most people dislike deviating from majority norms and fear losing face with family or friends. This can make them reluctant to participate when cultural expectations place a low value on adult education for women.

In areas where several generations have left school with few skills or qualifications and employment prospects are limited, the majority view can be that education has little or no benefit.

Traditional views of women’s primary role as domestic can deter women from seeking training and employment as they detract from time for children and family.

Some of the young women engaged by StreetVibes (case study 9) were lone parents who tended to bounce from living independently (sometimes in hostels) to returning to their mother’s home. 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.

Women’s aspirations for training and employment can be influenced by gendered views on suitable employment. There are often the ‘6Cs’ low paid, often part time occupations: cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering, childcare and clerical. These can be suitable for some women but many never consider wider options before making their choice.

StreetVibes found that many young women's aspirations were focused on health and beauty where it was believed there were jobs and self-employment opportunities. This was reinforced by what providers offered to young people.

Caring responsibilities

Domestic and caring responsibilities remain substantial obstacles to learning and employment for women. These include caring for older, sick or disabled family members as well as childcare.

Some women have large families or full-time care roles so cannot spare the time to train or work outside the home, especially if they have little support from their spouse or family or are lone parents.

Lack of accessible, affordable childcare and programmes that are not timed to accommodate women's need to take children to and from school or the care demands and expense of school holidays are major deterrents.

Location

Training located where women have to travel any distance can hinder access because it demands time they cannot afford. This is especially true for women who have to combine training with caring duties. In addition finding money for the fares can be difficult. Transport is often a big problem in rural areas.

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).

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).

English language

Lack of fluency in written or spoken English reduces employment and training options. It can limit their knowledge of opportunities and their ability to access them.

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".

Access to information

Limited awareness of where to access Information, Advice or Guidance (IAG), of possible training opportunities, what learning involves, and where it takes place can constitute huge barriers to participation (this was highlighted as a key barrier 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 IAG offered in accessible situations. Some adults lack the information literacy or language skills to access written information.

Skills and capabilities

Prior learning and employment experiences can impede access to training and the labour market. Low level or out of date qualifications and lack of recent or relevant work experience may limit women to low skilled work which is poorly paid and with poor working conditions. This can lower their confidence and belief that they can build their skills to improve employment prospects which in turn inhibits some from taking up training programmes.

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

Poverty

Poverty can be a substantial barrier to participation. Some women, whether the family is on benefits or members are in work, are not allowed access to money for personal expenditure or do not feel they can take some for themselves. Women may lack money for childcare, transport or course materials.

Of the women attending Bal Maidens (case study 10) only one or two participants over the life of the project were working and almost all were on benefit. Their chaotic lifestyles often meant that they were not getting the benefits they were entitled to and they were in constant fear of benefits being withdrawn.

Discrimination

Some women perceive they are discriminated against on the basis of one or more factors that include their gender, ethnicity, religion / belief, disability, sexuality, trans status or age. Although difficult to prove, discrimination is significant as it leads to unjust restriction of opportunities and affects confidence and aspiration.

Accessible employment opportunities

Employment prospects also influence aspirations and commitment to training. Women are being affected by the recession³ and female unemployment looks set to rise still further as jobs are cut from the public sector where high numbers of women are employed⁴.

There are indications that the recession is changing perceptions of work in different ways. Some women, of all ages including young women who have never worked, feel that work is unattainable. In contrast, other women are becoming very keen to

³ See, for example, Fawcett: www.fawcettsociety.org.uk and the TUC: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-15872-f0.cfm> accessed May 31 2011.

⁴ 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.

access work so that they can contribute to family finances⁵. Changes in welfare support⁶ are pushing some women into the labour market so that more women are searching for opportunities in the labour market when the overall number of jobs available has reduced.

Multiple disadvantage

Women experiencing multiple disadvantages have complex problems which can intensify the barriers to learning and employment set out above. The combination of two or more factors can severely restrict women's ability to access, stay the course and succeed in learning and training. In addition, chaotic lifestyles and complicated patterns of multi-agency involvement can reduce their availability to attend learning programmes. These can include:

- low levels of confidence and self-esteem;
- severe poverty;
- lack of qualifications;
- limited employment history;
- domestic or sexual abuse;
- drug and alcohol misuse;
- discrimination, and;
- histories of offending.

⁵ 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>

⁶ Changes to lone parent requirements to work, the freeze on child benefit, caps on housing benefit and benefits and tax credits reduced.

5) Strategies to recruit women and support them to succeed and progress

This section sets out strategies drawn from programmes that are successfully engaging women in learning and training and supporting them to succeed and progress. Programmes are most successful when providers:

- consider the circumstances and needs of the women they wish to recruit;
- actively identify their interests and barriers;
- adopt appropriate, gender aware strategies to address them;
- offer gender aware information, advice and guidance;
- offer supported work experience placements;
- develop effective local partnerships, including with employers.

Engagement and recruitment

The research indicated that there is no one way to engage women. Programmes need to be designed to reach the groups identified as potential learners.

Approaches that reach out to these groups in places where they live, work and/or socialise tend to be most effective. In other words, going out to women works better than expecting them to come to you.

Research the groups you want to work with

The key to successful engagement is to find out the needs, interests, circumstances and potential barriers to the participation of the women you want to work with. 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).

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).

Use word of mouth

Word of mouth is one of the most effective approaches to recruiting women. This is because many respond best to personal contact, especially when they lack self-confidence, do not know what is on offer, and do not know about, or use, established referral agencies. People who live or work in communities are usually best placed to inform and encourage local women to take up learning and training. Word of mouth is most effective where organisations have built a good reputation and developed strong networks and local contacts.

- 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.
- Volunteer or paid outreach workers go out into communities to communicate with people where they are in places such as schools, clinics, Children's Centres, public libraries, doctors' surgeries, community centres and youth projects and local sport and music events, fairs, melas, and festivals.

"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: case study 1).

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).

- Adults from the target group encourage and support their peers to take up learning. They are known by different titles such as community learning champions, learning advocates or barefoot workers. They are effective because they are ‘someone like them’ to potential learners/trainees who then 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 English⁷.

Young recruiters were a strong component of StreetVibes SO2 project for young people (case study 9).

- Publicising success and establishing trust with local people will encourage programme graduates and others to spread the word to family and friends.

⁷ 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.

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).

Informal activity

Informal activity such as coffee mornings, open days or informal taster sessions can offer safe opportunities for women to find out about programmes, discuss their interests and concerns and meet staff before they commit to learning. They can also offer advice on finances and childcare and, where appropriate, wider issues that can inhibit access to learning, such as housing or drug or alcohol issues. 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.

The WO engagement officers speak a range of community languages.

Informal activities can be complemented by one-to-one 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.

Working with referral agencies and other organisations

Building relationships with staff in referral agencies such as Jobcentre Plus can build mutual knowledge and understanding. This can enhance the ability of advisors to identify and signpost women who might benefit from the training programmes. Specialist agencies or organisations working with specific groups, for instance Black and Minority Ethnic adults with disabilities, are able to assist in recruiting women who might not otherwise reach provision.

Referrals to Nottingham Women's Centre provision from Jobcentre Plus increased when staff had either visited the Women's Centre or had been visited by a member of the team (case study 3).

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).

Advertising

Some women respond to flyers and newspaper adverts.

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).

These methods are not usually as effective for women furthest from learning and training or who do not have strong use of literacy. They can, however, inform workers in the area who are in a position to use the information to signpost the women they have contact with.

Some programmes have found local or community radio effective (case studies 3, 5 and 8).

Social media

Use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and web blogs is starting to increase as a means of engagement.

TCHC recruited some women through Twitter and the website 'Mum's the Boss'⁸ which supports women in business (case study 6).

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

However, this is only effective in reaching people who use social media, which in the case of Twitter in particular, is more likely to be younger women⁹.

Training structure and content

There is no fixed format or content for pre-employment training. The strong message is that the structure and content of learning and the support offered must be:

- accessible;
- flexible;
- personalised;
- appropriate to need and circumstances.

This will offer women the maximum opportunity to maintain attendance, raise their aspirations and achieve their potential.

Location

Locating training close to where women live or on accessible public transport routes makes it easier to access.

⁸ Available at: <http://www.mumstheblog.co.uk/> (accessed May 31 2011).

⁹ 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. Social Media 3Q Update: Who Uses Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, & MySpace? *Social Media Today*. Available at:

http://socialmediatoday.com/paulkiser/199133/social-media-3q-update-who-uses-facebook-twitter-linkedin-myspace?utm_source=Webbiquity (accessed May 31 2011).

Surrey Care Trust, for instance has a 'pram pushing policy' meaning they offer provision within walking distance of the communities they serve (case study 1).

Some projects organise transport to support participants with health difficulties and disabilities or in rural areas to access provision.

Where there were one or two learners in adjoining villages, community transport was organised from a central point (case study 4).

Dates and times

Provision must be flexible to support access for women with caring responsibilities. Timing programmes to fit with school times or to take place in term time makes them more accessible. Where possible, flexibility in attendance requirements aids access and retention.

Childcare

Supporting access to childcare provision is a pre-requisite, especially for mothers of pre-school children and during the school holidays, utilising ESF funding. Support might include offering childcare support for the programme where practical, or providing information about local childcare provision. As cost can be a major deterrent, financial support for childcare can support access.

In Kirklees, lack of childcare provision/facilities in the district generally deterred women from attending provision rather than the cost (case study 7).

However, even when there is local, free, quality childcare available, some women may be reluctant to use it, for example they might not want place their children in the care of anyone outside their own family. As case studies 8 and 9 indicated, some women did not want to use childcare facilities. Research will indicate what type of childcare is acceptable.

Crèche facilities are provided on site and free of charge at TheWO, Liverpool and Durham County Council uses a mobile crèche.

Financial support

The costs of care, travel, course materials, suitable clothes for attending interviews, volunteering or work experience can be considerable. Meeting or contributing to these costs can assist women to take part and benefit fully from training opportunities.

Birmingham Rathbone meets the travel costs of the young people who can travel independently and offers financial incentives to encourage young people to attend and achieve (case study 5).

StreetVibes offers small incentives such as phone top ups to enable learners to keep in touch which also assists retention (case study 9).

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. Women in this situation can benefit from provision such as taster sessions, short courses or staged entry as a route into learning and to boost their confidence. This provision can be offered by the provider or through referral to a voluntary sector or other partner.

Initial assessment

As with all learning it is important to carry out initial assessment to support programme design, to identify learners' 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 aware 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.

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? (Case study 8).

It is also vital to ensure that advisors understand women 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 dividing learning into 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.

Initial assessment and planning should take into account the pervasiveness of gender stereotyping in order to start widening possibilities for women as they start to plan their learning.

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).

Programme length

Providing short courses or dividing courses into modules can introduce women to learning gradually. This helps to build their confidence and capacity to learn and prepares them for entry to longer learning programmes requiring more hours of commitment. Small chunks of learning can help learners maintain a programme in the initial stages. This approach enables them to try things out, gain recognition for their learning and start to identify where their aptitudes and interests lie. This is confidence building, motivating and aids retention. Optional sessions work better for

both young women and older women 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).

On line learning

Opportunities to train remotely or online can enhance access for some women, including some disabled women or women who find it difficult to leave home because they live some distance from provision, 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 included limited access to IT facilities, lack of IT and literacy skills, isolation and losing the benefits of group interaction and support. Approaches that blend face-to-face and supported online learning are often more realistic options for women experiencing these barriers.

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 most likely to succeed is:

- gender sensitive;
- flexible;
- creative;
- tailored to the individual needs of the women who attend the programme;
- supported by inspirational teachers;
- designed to sustain interest and promote success;
- uses a range of appropriate and relevant teaching and learning strategies;
- uses gender sensitive materials relevant to the learners;
- offers accreditation -and support to women who need information on how to get their qualifications from outside the UK recognised).

Building confidence

It is important that both methodologies and content are designed to build confidence as low confidence is consistently identified as a significant barrier for women. This in turn can heighten ambition and the conviction of women learners that they can succeed in training and work.

Small group sizes, especially in the initial stages or for vulnerable women, allow for more personal attention. They also make participating and speaking in the group more accessible, thus building confidence. Developing communication skills has the dual benefits of building confidence to speak out whilst developing skills for the workplace.

One approach uses an approach that helps participants realise they can change the way they see themselves and the way they respond to the relationships, situations and challenges in their lives (case study 1).

Using women role models is a positive and creative way of illustrating to potential learners what women from backgrounds like themselves can achieve. It can be highly motivating, stimulating them 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 and take charge of decisions, and that learning can support them to do so.

Successful women from the same ethnic backgrounds as 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: Questionnaire, Successful strategies to address barriers).

Vocational skills

The content will include specific or generic vocational skills depending on the purpose and aims of the programme. Relating these to the local labour market can assist women's employment opportunities, particularly in a recession. It is vital that programmes are aware of local opportunities and the occupations in which recruits are more likely to secure employment. It is also important to recognise that relating information and skills to a restricted number of occupations can close down opportunities. In contrast, introducing content relevant to a wide range of occupations, including those in non-traditional sectors, can open up new horizons. This can be challenging when the range of opportunities is not on offer locally. An effective response to this is to raise aspirations and broaden horizons, but within a framework that acknowledges the realities of the local labour market.

Employability and job search skills

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 especially important for women with no recent employment history.

Content that familiarises women with modern work place cultures and expectations as well as their rights at work can be a valuable means of both building their confidence, motivation and aspirations and enhancing their employment prospects. This is particularly critical 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.

Self-employment

Self-employment can be a positive option for some women. It can offer 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 supporting a move to self employment for people a long way from the labour market. 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 will include realistic assessment of the potential market, capital requirements, business planning, marketing (case study 8) as well as personal drive and capabilities.

TheWO offers support from a personal tutor/business advisor for as long as the women need it (case study 8).

Work experience

Supported work experience or volunteering in work taster sessions or more sustained programmes was identified as a very significant success factor. This experience builds women's confidence, motivation and skills for work. It also increases their employment prospects by providing recent employment experience. 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.

Work experience or volunteering can take place in public sector, private sector or civil society organisations, and is particularly effective when offered in occupations where there are real employment prospects. Some training programmes offered opportunities within their organisations and supported trainees through to paid employment.

Surrey Care Trust provides women with opportunities to move on to skills development through working with a Community Interest Company called Holistic Harmony¹⁰. 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

Customised support is key to success as needs differ. Some women need very little support whilst others require varied and/or intensive support, especially those with challenging life circumstances. Successful providers adopted very flexible and

¹⁰ <http://www.holisticharmony.org.uk/index.html>

creative approaches to support. They often drew down additional funding for focused support which in turn appeared to lead to successful employment outcomes.

Surrey Care Trust's status means they attract and raise other sources of funding which can be used to provide opportunities to offer extra and individual support (case study 1).

Support towards independence

It is important to differentiate 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 support women to succeed by equipping them to support themselves into, 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. However, fostering independence should always underpin support through a programme.

Women only groups

Women-only groups can make training more accessible to women who feel more comfortable or safer than they would in a mixed environment; for example, because of religious or cultural reasons or experiences of violence and abuse (although not all women feel that a women only group is important).

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).

Nottingham Women's Centre and DP-EVH and KCC, funded by Kirklees Council, offer women-only environments for cultural reasons.

The women only-environment creates a safe and empowering environment that assists women to develop and is safe for women with mental health problems and survivors of abuse (case study 8).

It is important to consider progression and how women can be supported to move from women-only groups into mixed working environments. Some women might prefer to start in women-only groups and progress to learning in mixed groups when they have built their confidence. Others are willing from the start to learn in mixed groups. It is important that a gender aware, respectful and supportive ethos is created in mixed groups.

Personal support

It is common amongst successful providers to telephone or text 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. Following up immediately anyone who misses a class 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).

Nottingham Women’s Centre offers weekly 1 to 1 mentoring support (case study 3).

Literacy, language and numeracy

Support for learning could include literacy, language or numeracy support, developing IT skills and/or study support which can be integrated into programmes or offered as additional support.

Durham offers language support for ESOL learners (case study 4).

Classroom 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 (case study 4). One-to-one work also enables support to be adapted to a range of specific individual needs, for instance those of disabled participants.

One-to-one support was particularly crucial to the success of Nottingham Women's Centre's ESF provision (case study 3).

Mentors and buddies

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

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).

Building group support

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. Many benefit from peer support. 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).

Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Appropriate, gender sensitive and timely IAG is essential at each stage of the learning journey to support access and progression. It should be:

- informed by knowledge of the gender dimensions to training and employment;
- designed to open a wide range of options, including 'non traditional' ones;
- support choices, and;
- tailored to women's 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.

Durham tutors and development workers provide IAG for pre-entry level ESOL learners as the women value the relationship and trust these advisors. However, access to specialist Next Step advisors is also offered (case study 4).

It is essential that advisors take into account all the factors relating to women's circumstances. This will encourage them to progress and ensure the information the women receive is accurate and does not raise false expectations. Women with an offending history, for instance, need tailored advice about job search and application, covering matters such as whether any occupations are barred and disclosure of

offences. Women holding overseas qualifications with work histories in other countries will need specialist advice on routes back into work, including questions such as whether they can gain recognition of their qualifications and the process and costs of doing so. They may also need advice on realistic alternatives where factors such as language or lack of recognition of their qualifications preclude 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).

LAG provides an opportunity to challenge occupational gender segregation which starts at an early age meaning that even young women perceive jobs in terms of gender appropriateness. This in turn can limit career and learning aspirations, choice and job search¹¹.

At Birmingham Rathbone, staff consider the gender imbalance, for example, the small proportion of young men on childcare courses, and try to encourage young people to consider the wide range of avenues they could pursue (case study 5).

Some women experiencing multiple barriers need access to advice on support to address issues which could be detrimental to their learning. These could include housing support and advice, counselling services, benefits, debt, finance and budgeting, health advice and support, avoiding involvement in gangs and/or assistance with substance misuse. These might be provided within a project where

¹¹ Women and Work Commission, 2009. *Shaping a Fairer Future. A review of the recommendations of the Women and Work Commission three years on.* London: Government Equalities Office.

available, but will usually be arranged through a multi-agency approach in partnership with other local services.

Birmingham Rathbone housing services are important for young people who are estranged from their families or who are 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).

Progression

Once started and with support and experiences of success in learning the majority of women are likely to want to progress to further training and/or work. Progression routes vary and progression is not always vertical but can be horizontal or spiky. The speed of progress differs, influenced by factors such as starting point, confidence levels, previous education, lifestyle and personal circumstances. The circumstances of some women mean progression profiles can be spiky and securing work can take several years, with one programme citing six years for some women to move to accessing employment.

Progression routes and advice therefore need to be tailored and realistic. Staff need good knowledge of opportunities for learning and employment, 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.

DP-EVH and KCC in Kirklees use longstanding links with partners to support learners to move on to further learning (case study 7).

Progression to employment

The current economic climate will reduce the number of jobs available in many areas. The case evidence illustrates that progression to employment is more assured where providers have built up active relationships with local employers.

They:

- build employers' confidence that the employment programmes can assist with their recruitment;
- provide opportunities to work with employers, and where appropriate, trades unions;
- 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. As a result 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 training organisations offer volunteering opportunities in their own organisation supported by vocational training. This can lead to paid employment in these organisations, for example as teachers, administrative, 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 must be able to understand and respond to women's situations. It is vital that training organisations build their capacity in order to work successfully with diverse women. What is required will of course depend on the starting point of the organisation and its staff. The first step is

to audit this. Employing staff and volunteers who understand the needs of women learners can be a valuable factor in effective recruitment, retention and success in learning. A staff profile that reflects the local community can attract women to learning and ensure that the provision is organised to respond to their needs and circumstances.

An effective approach is to recruit and train people from similar backgrounds. 'Home grown' staff can include tutors, advisors, mentors, support workers, outreach workers and volunteers. These staff will contribute local knowledge, insight, strategies rooted in real experiences, ensure the programme is welcoming and appropriate and act as role models. This type of staff profile can take time to build through recruiting and training local people, and offering work experience and volunteering.

Partnership working

The importance of working with partners and building strong and wide networks has been highlighted throughout this section. This can be most effective as a planned process. Successful training organisations identify key partners and networks and the mutual benefits they can offer. Partners might include statutory services, third sector partners and employers who can help with signposting, IAG, support for learning, progression, work experience and volunteering, counselling, and support with challenges beyond the scope of the provider such as housing or mental health. Links with local civil society organisations can assist training providers to learn more about the different issues that potential learners face as well as strategies for addressing them.

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).

Thriving partnerships require work to build and maintain them. Successful providers put time and energy into aspects such as establishing clarity of purpose and what is

required from, and offered to, the relationships, building trust and confidence, developing shared understanding of values and ethos, and working transparently and efficiently for mutual benefit.

The Women's Centre has a long and successful history of working with a wide range of partners. The Skills for Jobs programme benefited from these partnerships and networks even when there was no formal link with the course itself (case study 3).

Partnerships with employers are critical. Providers can use them to gain an understanding of what employers are looking for. They also offer opportunities for providers to demonstrate the business benefits of engaging with their training programme. These might include:

- the opportunity to 'try out' potential employees through work experience;
- low or no cost recruitment;
- keen employees;
- support from providers as the trainees transfer into work.

Surrey Care Trust's partnership with Holistic Harmony provides volunteering experience for learners (case study 1).

TCHC's Skills for Jobs Adviser was responsible for liaison with partner organisations, employers and employer organisations in the region (case study 6).

Links with employers can also raise their awareness of the potential of women from different backgrounds. They can influence employers' attitudes to flexible working to enable them to benefit from women's skills. They can also help combat prejudice and discrimination and enhance the employment prospects of groups such as disabled women. This awareness has been effectively extended to wider workforces to dispel myths and build constructive attitudes and relationships which in turn can increase workplace morale and productivity.

TCHC's links with employers are a strong success factor. They convince employers of the benefits of taking on trainees including low or no recruitment costs and motivated and keen employees (case study 6).

6) Checklist

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.

7) Case studies

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

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

Short introduction

The Surrey Care Trust is an independent charity, set up almost 30 years ago, helping 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. The Family and Community Education (FACE) programme run by the Trust works with large numbers of women who have experienced drug or alcohol abuse, mental ill-health, offending, young parents who missed or 'dropped out' of school and women who have experienced a trauma or dramatic change in their life such as separation, family break-down or illness. As a result of these life experiences the women tend to have low self-esteem and limited experience of employment, or have not worked for many years.

Main features

Outreach work is a key feature. This involves taking provision out to particular, identified communities and reaching out to new and different adults. Community facilitators and development workers (who are often also teachers) live within the target areas and often started as learners so understand the issues. This aspect is a powerful recruitment activity.

Linking with local organisations including schools, Children's Centres, health centres, libraries, voluntary and community organisations, Jobcentre Plus and other learning providers is also important to successful recruitment. Development workers build trust to support referral and joint working.

Outreach activities can be very informal and opportunity-driven; conversations take place at school gates, in high streets, and in community centres. Engagement often happens because conversations with women about the challenges they are facing create opportunities to talk about learning, then women are invited to join a group to

share their experiences with other women in similar situations. When women express any interest in 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 and acting as a 'buddy' to support them in referrals to other organisations. These individualised and personalised recruitment approaches help to ensure a good match between the women and learning.

Programmes are generally planned and negotiated in partnership with learners, referral organisations and the development workers. Once a few women have expressed an interest, dates are agreed and other women encouraged and supported to join. Other courses are arranged in negotiation with partner organisations. Many groups run with only women to support those who need a safe women-only environment.

Short introductory courses (usually 2 hours a week, for 5 or 6 weeks) invite a commitment to learning which longer courses might not achieve. They are designed to respond to the women's interests, build confidence, and support women to recognise possibilities for change. Trust staff's knowledge of the common experiences and challenges faced by women and their families at particular stages of their lives help create a 'core' curriculum, designed to raise confidence in the learners' current roles and explore next steps in learning.

Progression opportunities include learning on any one of the modules offered by the Trust, in the localities where learners live and/or referral to other agencies and organisations.

All Trust courses are designed to build the women's confidence in their ability to learn and find employment. The range of courses available includes 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. 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.

Group sizes are deliberately small so that a high level of personal attention can be given. 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.

The Trust offers a stepping stone to a real work environment by providing opportunities to train with Lucis College Ltd in a wide range of alternative therapies and a Community Interest Company, Holistic Harmony who provide volunteering, work experience opportunities and mentoring. Learners are supported to use their skills at corporate events, with companies and for the public. They can progress to become volunteers who continue to practise and develop their skills and are supported to look more actively for paid employment opportunities. Volunteers can also begin to learn how to develop their own enterprise activities.

Key message

Recruitment activity, provision, content, support and activities to support progression are designed to take account of and respond to the experiences and circumstances of women with challenging backgrounds. 'Home grown' facilitators who have experienced many of the same barriers and supported to develop their skills and qualifications with Surrey Care Trust to become development workers, teachers and act as role models, are key to success.

Impact

The latest ESF report (December 2010) identified that of 299 women, 134 completed non accredited courses, 165 completed accredited courses, 50 women went on work placements and 14 women found employment.

Project information

Region: South East

Sub-regions: Surrey

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: Surrey Care Trust

Partner organisations: Almost 70 companies, 24 Grant Making Trusts and over 30 organisations which include schools, universities, clubs, local authorities and the police and probation services as supporters of their work.

Key sectors: Voluntary, across sectors

Activities: Promoting education and training throughout working life, integrating disadvantaged people into employment, developing lifelong learning

Key target groups: Females, hardest to help, unemployed, long-term unemployed, Basic skills, adults with no or low qualifications, lone parents and other disadvantaged parents

Funding: £539,972

Start date: 01/06/2008

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://www.surreycaretrust.co.uk/> www.lucisgroup.com
www.holisticharmonycic.org.uk

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

Short introduction

The *Personal Best* programme at Weymouth College aims to build self-esteem and employability skills through accredited event management and volunteering programmes. The course includes 20 hours practical experience in event management. Up to 10 per cent of volunteers at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games are expected to be drawn from people who have successfully completed the Personal Best programme.

Main features

When launched in 2009 the Personal Best programme at the college mainly attracted men, but as the programme has progressed the female profile has increased.

The Adult Skills Curriculum Manager designed the programme to complement the Basic Skills and the Access provision at the college. The programme attracts a higher than average number of women with a disability (44 per cent of all women), 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. Some of the parents have school age children with quite significant additional health or emotional needs and some have children who are in care.

The main recruitment route is word of mouth which partly accounts for the growing number of women on the programme since its inception. A number of the women have been referred by advisers specialising in supporting adults with a disability, addiction, or mental health needs, or via the Weymouth Community Volunteers.

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 8 and 10 weeks to enable women with school age children to participate.

The underpinning ethos of the course is that positive and safe learning experiences help build the confidence and self-esteem that helps secure work as a volunteer which in turn is a valuable step towards paid employment. These include group work, recognising mutual experiences and circumstances, building a peer support ethos, and follow up if anyone misses a session.

A variety of progression routes include: applications to be Olympic Games makers; volunteering; attending other short courses; part-time employment; Higher Education; or self-employment.

Key message

Recruitment and on course support must be tailored to the circumstances of women recruits. Time invested in developing and sustaining partnerships with local agencies who work with the target women is essential to support informed referral by advisers specialising in supporting adults with a disability, addiction or mental health needs.

Impact

The objective of the project was for 70 eligible, unemployed participants to gain the Personal Best certificate, a Level 1 qualification based on event volunteering. Successful completion of the Personal Best programme and a successful application will guarantee an interview to become a Games Time Volunteer in the 2012 Olympic Games.

Of the 99 starters on Personal Best, 29 were women. Eleven completed the course, 10 have withdrawn or are taking a temporary break and 11 have successfully completed both the programme and the 20 hours of volunteering.

Project information

Region: South West

Sub-regions: Dorset

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Partner organisations: Weymouth Community Volunteers, Alcohol and Drug Community Aftercare Programme (ADCAP), Probation Service, Jobcentre Plus, the Sailing Academy and the Pavilion Theatre.

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Integrating disadvantaged people into employment, developing lifelong learning

Key target groups: Unemployed, No or low qualifications, Hardest to help, Females or women or gender equality, Economically inactive, Advice and guidance

Funding: £100,000

Start date: 21/08/2009

End date: 29/07/2011 extended to December 2011

Project web site: <http://www.weymouth.ac.uk/>

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

Short introduction

Skills for Jobs takes place within the range of provision and support available at the Nottingham Women's Centre, an organisation with a long and successful record of working with women. The programme aims to enable 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. All activities are women only.

Main feature

Nottingham Women's Centre is open to women who live and work in the County of Nottinghamshire. The Centre has a long and successful history of working with vulnerable women and with a range of training organisation partners. The Centre runs courses and learning activities, projects and a range of alternative therapies. It also houses a crèche offering 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 uses a number of different and complementary strategies for recruitment. Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool, through networking with grass roots organisations with direct contact with women encountering multiple barriers who are not engaged with the Women's Centre. Raising the awareness of their work with Jobcentre Plus advisors increased referrals. Brochures and fliers placed with local organisations including libraries, health centres and hospitals, and publicity on local radio were also successful.

The women engaged on Skills for Jobs were over 19; 30 to 40 per cent were from BME groups and most were aged 30 to 50. Most of the women had low educational attainment and low or no qualifications and some had specific learning difficulties including dyslexia and Asperger's. The majority of women had serious personal issues including experience of domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Most had negative experiences and pessimistic expectations of education. A large number had mental health issues and long term unemployment was commonplace.

The women on the course 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. Cultural, language and attitudinal barriers included lack of confidence for some women and an inability or unwillingness to attend training where men were present.

Flexibility and appreciation of their challenges is considered essential to keep the women 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 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. A local partner 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 other activities run mainly by volunteers alongside the course itself.

All learners receive an initial assessment and subsequent action plan. This is revised as necessary at weekly 1-to-1 meetings over the course of 5 weeks 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 5 weekly regular meeting to deal with additional matters that arise. The other services at the Centre, such as advice on a range of issues and therapeutic activities also contribute to keeping the women on track.

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. Women are encouraged to consider qualifications in the fields of work they volunteer in.

Key message

Managers, partners and learners all consider the support for the women on the course to be the key to its success. A combination of 1-to-1 weekly mentoring support as well as housing and supporting other local organisations at the Women's Centre provides a secure and responsive support system to help staff support women's complex lives.

Impact

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 retention rate on the course is high with around 90 per cent of learners progressing from initial assessment to course commencement. More than 80 per cent of learners complete the programme.

Project information

Region: East Midlands

Sub-regions: Nottingham

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: Kamyabi

Partner organisations: Working Links, Enable, Castle College

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Promoting education and training throughout working life, Partnerships, networks and initiatives, integrating disadvantaged people into employment, Developing lifelong learning, Gender equality, Childcare, Advice and guidance

Key target groups: Unemployed, No or low qualifications, Lone parents and other disadvantaged parents, Hardest to help, Females

Funding: £170,991

Start date: 01/09/2008

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://nottinghamwomenscentre.com/>

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

Short introduction

Durham County Council Adult Learning Service (DCC ALS) ESF funded ESOL programme aimed to target individuals living in settled communities who spoke little or no English, who were economically inactive or claiming unemployment benefits to engage in ESOL provision (pre-entry) with a view to progression into mainstream learning.

Main feature

Fifty women aged between 25 and 49 were engaged in the project. The project worked with men but women were the significant majority. Many of the learners came from areas of deprivation and social isolation. Some lived in close proximity to each other in communities where their first language was the language of choice for all discourse. Successful recruitment activities included coffee mornings, drop-in engagement events at local libraries and other community venues, and working with known and trusted community champions. The project worked with schools with a high percentage of Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) children, where, for example, fliers were circulated in book bags. 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 including Parent Support Advisers and local community networks.

Development workers were employed to engage individual learners and to link up with voluntary and community agencies, schools and faith groups. Teaching staff included specialist ESOL tutors and classroom support tutors. Thirteen 6-week programmes were set up across County Durham which started in July 2010 and finished at the end of March 2011. Experience illustrated that shorter programmes were more likely to attract 'hard to reach' groups who tend not to sign up to long programmes of 10 weeks or more. Class sizes were kept small to ensure the women had the support they needed from the specialist tutor whilst additional support

workers were also available at some classes for learners requiring 1-to-1 support. Women-only groups were available to address cultural barriers.

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 were more convenient for the target groups i.e. during school hours and early evening.

Each learner undertook an initial assessment, using pictorial questionnaires to gauge their English language skills. A realistic Individual Learning Programme (ILP) was developed identifying appropriate learning styles. The decision was taken to provide Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) through tutors and development workers rather than IAG professionals. Feedback from the learners revealed that the women valued their relationship with project staff and the trust that developed. The women were at pre-entry level and IAG was tailored to this as well as appropriate progression onto mainstream provision. Access to specialist Next Step advisers was also offered.

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

Support services including language support and transport were available. Where there were 1 or 2 learners in adjoining villages, community transport was organised from a central point. Childcare support was also available on each programme provided on the DCC mobile crèche with qualified child minders. Development workers and community engagement workers accompanied some of the women to the first few sessions to provide additional support and confidence.

Key message

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.

Impact

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

Project information

Region: North East

Sub-regions: Durham

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Partner organisations: 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.

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Pre Entry ESOL, Confidence Building, Information, Advice & Guidance

Key target groups: Unemployed Adults whose first language is not English and operating at pre-entry level

Funding: £80,200

Start date: 31/03/2010

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://www.durham.gov.uk/Pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=27>

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Case Study 5: West Midlands - Birmingham Rathbone: ACCLR8

Short introduction

Birmingham Rathbone ran an ESF funded programme that worked with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) from February 2009 - March 2011. It aimed 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 learners were aged between 16 and 19 and from diverse backgrounds.

Main features

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. Learning Programme Officers work with the learners to enhance their social and interactive skills and provide confidential and personal support. Other staff include tutors and trainers in literacy and numeracy, childcare, hospitality and horticulture and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) staff.

The ACCLR8 training was marketed across Birmingham and Solihull but there was no specific agenda for targeting women. A range of marketing methods included advertising on television and community radio, having materials in locations such as Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, GPs' surgeries, youth centres and leisure centres.

Outreach is a fundamental part of recruitment and may include home visits. Birmingham Rathbone works with an extensive number of partners which helps them reach a large number of young people not engaging with learning and training. This includes young women who have caring responsibilities. They make sure that schools are aware of the services they can provide around transition, and raise awareness at local sport and music events.

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 fêtes, 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.

At a potential learner's first IAG interview, an advisor works with them to draw up an action plan setting out how to achieve what they want to achieve. Staff offer impartial advice on what provision is available, and refer young people to partner organisations where appropriate, ensuring they have the pastoral support and care they need. It is important for advisors to have a good understanding of young people and their needs, and the ability to remain impartial.

The programme is individually tailored to each young person who helps shape their own activity plan with an IAG advisor. The IAG process has 3 components to assess a young person's:

- 1) personal and social development needs, including 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 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 and adjustments for disability, such as sign language support or a speech therapist.

ACCLR8 consisted of 12 to 30 hours of teaching a week over the course of approximately 15 weeks. 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 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.

The content of ACCLR8 is diverse: 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. Activities are social and interactive such as go-karting, fruit-picking or music workshops.

Key message

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. Face to face communication can overcome barriers; staff talk to young women about their aspirations and help them recognise the skills that they already have. Some young women may need revisiting over and over. There isn't always a quick fix.

Impact

Since January 2009, 366 young people have completed ACCLR8. 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.

Project information

Region: West Midlands

Sub-regions: Birmingham

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Partner organisations: Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, Birmingham Youth Service, local authority, NHS, Home Office, Social Services and a range of national organisations such as The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge.

Key sectors: Hospitality, Horticulture, Childcare and Health & Social Care

Activities: Work Taster, Social Development and Employment skills

Key target groups: 14-19 NEET or early-school leavers, lone parents and other disadvantaged parents, Hardest to help, Females

Funding: £1,585,564

Start date: 20/01/2009

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://www.rathbone.co.uk/>

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

Short introduction

TCHC (The Consultancy Home Counties) is a private training and brokerage organisation which covers the whole of the Eastern Region. It supports partner organisations by developing relationships with employers and employer bodies within the area. Training is delivered in both rural areas and the cities in the region – some of which have large BME populations.

Main feature

Skills for Jobs ran from autumn 2008 until the end of March 2011. There were two target groups - the client group for training and the employers required for successful employment. TCHC has a central staff team and delivery is through 12 partner organisations across the region.

Recruitment was through TCHC's marketing executive and advisers and the partner delivery organisations. Word of mouth, being well known in local communities and support groups were identified as important for recruitment. A large advertisement in a local paper's educational supplement was successful and recruited a different client group. Referral from Jobcentre Plus and its Lone Parent Adviser was another strand. Some women were recruited through social media such as 'Twitter' and the website 'Mum's the Blog'¹², which supports women in business.

Substantial barriers to women accessing mainstream provision were identified as language, poverty, reliance on benefits, the need for childcare, lack of confidence and low self-esteem, poor educational experience and lack of qualifications. Basic skills difficulties were identified and referrals to appropriate provision were made but this was not considered a common issue.

TCHC usually acted as a contractor of training, and activities were determined by partner delivery organisations. The training and guidance offered in this project were

¹² <http://www.mumstheblog.co.uk/>

thus closely related to and focussed on real prospects of employment. Advisers focused on available vacancies as much or more than on learners' aspirations. This was on the basis that jobs are the critical required outcome for these learners and that getting a job is easier when employed.

TCHC's partners are mainly voluntary and community organisations that are able both to support clients 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. TCHC supported providers through quarterly provider forums where they were able to discuss case studies, performance issues and best practice.

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 childcare courses ran in a women-only environment. This provision included 1-to-1 support. The women could also attend a programme of informal craft workshops.

The availability of Matrix Standard IAG¹³, free transport, childcare and training were all critical in encouraging potential learners to overcome their barriers.

Benefits for the women included increased confidence, a sense of direction and for many, the outcome of a job; 20 of the 28 women on the course with Family Groups were in jobs or volunteering at the end of the course. Sometimes *"tough love"* was needed to deal with issues like personal appearance, clothing for interviews and time-keeping, particularly for those who had been unemployed for a long time. Women expressed appreciation for the help they had received in preparation for interviews and sorting out a proper CV.

¹³ <http://www.matrixstandard.com/>

TCHC engaged employers through a campaign of events, press releases, e-mails, social media and events targeted at Chambers of Commerce and TCHC's network of employers. The selling point was that employers could cut recruitment costs by taking on a motivated candidate from the project. Relevant, local knowledge of job opportunities was vital to placing trainees. TCHC also had 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.

Key message

Looking closely at local job opportunities and gearing guidance on training towards real, available jobs and engaging employers resulted in a high success rate in placing women in jobs

Impact

The target for the project, which has been achieved, was the participation 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.

Project information

Region: East of England

Sub-regions:

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: Family Groups

Partner organisations: Approximately 12 at present

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Improving equal access to employment; Employment and training support for workers and companies; Partnerships, networks and initiatives; Integrating disadvantaged people into employment

Key target groups: Unemployed and economically inactive people, migrants, females

Funding: £3,819,695

Start date: 01/07/2008

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://www.tchc.net/>

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

Short introduction

The Kirklees Skills for Jobs programme is fund managed by Kirklees Council. The Council commissioned a number of projects to deliver between July 2009 and June 2011, including the Kirklees Community Campus (KCC) and the Disabled People's Electronic Village Hall (DP-EVH). It aimed to motivate people back into structured learning and support them into further learning, training, voluntary work or employment.

Main features

Paddock Learning Centre (PLC), an independent, local charity, is the lead organisation for the KCC project, a partnership of community centres. The project offers vocational provision such as IT training, customer service skills, introductory and office IT and Skills for Life assessments, alongside pastoral support, mentoring, 1-1 support and IAG.

DP-EVH is a charity working predominantly with disabled and disadvantaged people. They recognised that their reputation for working with disabled people could create a barrier to working with able bodied learners. They therefore established *Work it Out*, a partnership of three organisations including Changeworks Consulting Ltd, and the Indian Muslim Welfare Society (IMWS) which uses community mentors to engage women from ethnic minority communities.

Work it Out aimed to motivate people back into learning and support them to progress through a range of options including Skills for Life and vocational training, for example, Business Administration, Childcare, IT, First Aid, Hygiene, fashion and soft furnishings, cake decorating and employability skills. Pastoral support, mentoring and IAG are also offered to ensure that learners' needs are fully met.

Both projects have effectively used community mentors with a good understanding of the area in order to gain the trust of potential learners. DP-EVH recognised that disabled women are often affected by care responsibilities, frequent hospital appointments or illness which may prevent them from regularly attending provision. To overcome this, DP-EVH maintains regular contact with learners and keeps training places open until a more appropriate time. This reduces learner anxiety and pressure to prematurely return, and has played a significant part in the retention of female learners.

Kirklees Council has developed networks including the Kirklees Worklessness Provider Group and Neighbourhood Learning Networks. These allow partners to gain an understanding of the provision on offer across the area and keep up to date with policy changes and funding opportunities.

KCC has used mentoring focussed on individual needs and aspirations, to support learner progression. In some instances, mentors were able to negotiate the creation of additional courses with partners in order to meet the needs of female learners who were ready to progress to further learning.

A large proportion of DP-EVH learners progress internally, perhaps as a result of a safe and welcoming environment. Others have progressed to College, into employment and into volunteering opportunities. IMWS identified a wish from a large number of women in the BME community to set up their own businesses, and tailored their provision and mentoring to support this.

Key message

A good knowledge of local communities and residents is vital and it is important to work with partners and organisations which have a good track record and reputation within their communities.

Impact

The KCC partnership delivered two projects which engaged 310 learners, 67% of whom were female. *Work it Out* included two projects which engaged 274 learners, 69% of whom were female. 184 female learners engaged on both projects have now left the programme and of them, over three-quarters achieved some or all of their learning outcomes and the majority moved into a positive progression route (employment, volunteering or further learning).

The majority of learners on the Kirklees Skills for Jobs programme were female and 75% of the women were from an ethnic minority background.

Project information

Region: Yorkshire and Humber

Sub-regions: West Yorkshire

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Partner organisations: Paddock Learning Centre (PLC), Disabled People's Electronic Village Hall (DP-EVH)

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Partnerships, networks and initiatives; integrating disadvantaged people into employment; advice and guidance

Key target groups: Kirklees residents, unemployed people, adults, people with low skills, people who are new customers of Jobcentre Plus or who are not yet in contact with them

Funding: £754,901

Start date: July 2009

End date: June 2011

Project web site: <http://www.kirkleescommunitycampus.blogspot.com/>

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

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

Short introduction

Be Enterprising is delivered by The Women's Organisation (TheWO), a social enterprise based in the centre of Liverpool. TheWO exists to improve the economic position of women. In particular, it aims to support women into self-employment.

Main features

TheWO uses a range of recruitment approaches to attract women. The work of the outreach staff is the single most successful method. Staff engage with women in local settings and hold stalls at local job fairs and events. Activities for children (for example, face-painting) are sometimes run as part of initial outreach, to keep children occupied while the outreach worker speaks to their mother. Outreach workers are able to engage with women who may have been unlikely to seek out learning provision due to cultural reasons, lack of confidence or English language skills, or because of childcare commitments. The engagement officers working in these areas speak a range of community languages, and recruitment materials are produced in different languages.

Word of mouth is also important for recruitment. 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 the local press and it has a high profile. The project has also been advertised in the free local press, on local radio, with leaflets and on TheWO's website.

Strong partnerships aid referral. The project has benefitted from TheWO's relationships with other local service providers to establish referral routes into the project.

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. Women are encouraged to disclose disability and accessibility needs at the point of registration, so that these can be addressed. Translated materials, interpretation (including British Sign Language) and non-English language teaching are available. Initial assessment and the project courses are delivered in trusted community venues close to where the women live.

Training is delivered to groups of 10 to 12 women at times and locations that fit in with their other commitments. Crèche facilities, if required, are also provided free of charge, on site and travel expenses are paid.

Enterprise training for women is an important factor in attracting and retaining women from some BME communities as homebased self-employment presents a feasible employment option for women whose culture is not supportive of women's work outside the home.

TheWO's 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.

Retention rates are high on the programme. The most significant reason is 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. This common sense of purpose and learning with a like-minded group can provide powerful support.

In addition, women on the programme are encouraged to use it as a source of further networking to support their future business development, for example, by sharing clients and expertise. Support from a personal tutor/business adviser is on-going and is available to women for as long as they need it.

Key message

Low confidence and self-esteem are tackled through initial contact, assessment and personal development. Training actively seeks to foster empowerment and self-employment which may be the only realistic employment option for some women.

Impact

A total of 1092 women have been engaged during the lifetime of the programme. Of the 1092 women, 218 were from BME backgrounds, 149 had a disability, 330 were lone parents and 800 were aged between 25 and 49 years.

Project information

Region: North West

Sub-regions: Liverpool

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: HMRC

Partner organisations: Jobcentre Plus, Business Link, Liverpool Jobs, Enterprise and Training (JET) Service, Children's Centres, adult learning centres, Citizens' Advice Bureau, disability organisations

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Integrating disadvantaged people into employment

Key target groups: Women, Engaging employers, Childcare, Advice and guidance, long-term unemployed and economically inactive people, ethnic minorities

Funding: £1,234,364

Start date: 02/06/2008

End date: 31/03/2011

Project web site: <http://www.train2000.org.uk/>

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Case Study 9: London - StreetVibes: SO2

Short introduction

StreetVibes is a VCS not-for-profit organisation delivering accredited courses in creative subjects. It was established in 2004 and works in over six London Boroughs. SO2, an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) project was based at their centre in Eltham, targeted at 16 – 19 year olds who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). 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. The project was mixed sex and about 40 per cent of those engaged were women.

Main features

Recruitment was labour intensive and needed in depth knowledge of the patterns of life of the target group. The project recruited at places where young people go in the course of their lives. 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 knew the young people who would benefit most from referral. These teams could also provide advice on benefits since the fear of losing benefits was a barrier to participation.

The project carried out some on the street recruitment which was successful in stimulating interest although the conversion rate to actual engagement was low. Word of mouth from young people to their peers was effective. The music studio StreetVibes offered was attractive to some young people. Fliers were distributed through partner organisations such as young women's hostels but these were found to be really effective only if backed up by personal contact.

The young people recruited to the programme had mixed experiences of learning and employment. The majority of the young women on the project had 4 or 5 GCSEs

at grades A – D but a number had literacy or numeracy problems and lacked confidence when they joined.

Initial meetings were held at Jobcentre Plus or the Connexions Centre as some of the young women were unwilling to travel to certain areas because of their associations with gang culture. Other forms of support and information were available at these sites, giving holistic support to vulnerable young people. Later sessions were organised in coffee shops, and other locations that were comfortable and convenient.

Most of the young women 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.

The project found that young women were more motivated to join the programme than young men. However, they found that the young women's aspirations tended to be 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. This was exacerbated by the number of providers whose only real training offer for disadvantaged young women was in those subject areas.

A minority of young women who were lone parents on the project 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. This meant that continued engagement was difficult. 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. The combination of childcare issues with the stress and tiredness that caring for young children brings added to de-motivation.

Retention through the guidance period was secured through close 1-to-1 contact and monitoring. Some small incentives were provided, such as £10 phone top up to keep in touch or transport fares. 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 was crucial as well as having availability to speak on the phone. Contact with one named individual was important.

Supporting the young people to progress onto Further Education (FE) provision involved partnership working. Learners saw benefits to community based provision as it was less like “studying” than other forms of learning. It was often easier for project staff to track learners’ progress as smaller organisations were more likely to know them personally. 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.

Key message

Successful recruitment involved going to places where young women would go. Working with Connexions was a key recruitment method since their staff knew which young women would benefit most from referral to StreetVibes. Exercising flexibility in accommodating young women’s concerns over transport and location of training was important, as was being prepared to learn from young women about the culture and mores in which they operate.

Impact

Target of sixty young people, of which:

- 25 were to progress to FE;
- 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 VCS organisation or Jobcentre Plus and work on Skills for Life.

The project overachieved on its targets.

Project information

Region: London

Sub-regions: South East London

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: Jobcentre Plus

Partner organisations: Connexions, local authority 14 – 19 teams, local FE College

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Improving equal access to employment

Key target groups: NEET 16 – 19 year olds, young women

Funding: £73,737

Start date: 01/07/2010

End date: 28/02/2011

Project web site: <http://www.streetvibes.org/streetvibes/home.html>

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

Short introduction

Bal Maidens is run by Gwellheans which was set up in 1996, providing a structured and holistic programme for people in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. Its provision which forms the background support to Bal Maidens 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 whilst Women's Aid provides a programme for survivors of domestic violence, and parenting skills are provided by Action for Children.

Main features

The programme was staffed by two women supported by a volunteer who provided peer support and mentoring to the women.

All the women came into the programme either by self-referral or through referral from another agency.

Women came into the group following the usual induction process to Gwellheans which involved an in-depth induction session within a maximum of 5 days after referral and a guarantee of being placed in provision within 5 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.

Bal Maidens was a women-only group whereas many of the other activities run through Gwellheans are mixed. The women on the project were all white and had in common their recovery from addiction, whether to alcohol or to drugs. Ages ranged from late 20s to early 60s with a majority of the women being 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, some were

highly educated and had professional backgrounds but had been damaged by their substance abuse.

Almost all had mental health problems and many had physical problems resulting from their previous lifestyle. Many came from backgrounds where abuse and neglect were endemic and intergenerational. Their addictions 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. Only one or two participants over the life of the project were in employment, and almost all were on benefits. The personal histories of the women left them with severe confidence issues.

The activities carried out were informal and varied. The group which varied in size from one or two to as many as 12 met weekly on a Friday from 11am – 2.00 pm. The programme included craft activities, arts workshops, trips to local attractions, therapeutic activities and reflexology all done in an environment where sharing of experiences and discussion were part of the package. Among the activities were job search and CV preparation. 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 that were part of their care and rehabilitation package.

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.

These multiple factors had a big impact on their abilities to engage with provision. However, many believed that the structure given by the programme at Gwellheans, of which Bal Maidens was a part, was the solution to their problems.

The support of the women for each other was identified as a strong factor in promoting attendance. There had been problems with retention which had led to the women themselves setting up what was called the “rubric” of what was expected of group members. The peer pressure this exerted had changed things to mean much more regular attendance. The support volunteer and peer support were also important mechanisms. In addition, every woman had a key worker within Gwellheans who was a source of vital on-going support.

Gwellheans had a very significant network of partners and this network made Gwellheans a one-stop shop for many.

Key message

The project provided the holistic support needed for women learners with severe and multiple challenges to engage with and stay on the project.

Impact

There were no employment targets for the project. However, some of the women moved on to further education and training, to volunteering and in a few cases to employment.

Project information

Region: Cornwall

Sub-regions: Cornwall

Objective: Competitiveness and employment

Priority area: 1: Extending employment opportunities

Themes: Gender equality

Co-financer: Skills Funding Agency

Lead partner: Cornwall Development Company

Partner organisations: Jobcentre Plus, Cornwall College, Women's Aid, Pentreath, Cornwall County Council.

Key sectors: Across sectors

Activities: Developing lifelong learning; partnerships; networks and initiatives

Key target groups: Unemployed people; people with no or low qualifications; lone parents and other disadvantaged parents; those who are hardest to help; women.

Funding: Funding via Cornwall Development Company Ltd. Distributed grants up to £12,000 per year for small third sector organisations to help support disadvantaged individuals within their communities.

Start date: September 2009

End date: December 2010

Project web site: <http://www.gwellheans.co.uk/20.html>

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