

Helping women from disadvantaged backgrounds make new starts: Women's Technology Training Limited

URN: 55416

Region: North West

Remit: Further education and skills

Provider background

Women's Technology Training Limited, known as [Blackburne House Education \(BHE\)](#), is a registered charity and is part of the Blackburne House Group (BHG). BHG covers five separate social enterprises with a shared set of values that define their approach to the education, training and empowerment of women.

BHE is situated in one of the most deprived areas of Liverpool, where many women have few or no qualifications. A significant number of learners are refugees, asylum seekers, lone parents, long-term unemployed or carers. BHE also offers programmes for women in safe houses. Around 40% of learners are from minority ethnic groups.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how BHE helps women from disadvantaged backgrounds develop confidence and skills that prepare them for work, further education or training.

Social enterprises, set up by BHG, provide valuable work experience for learners in areas such as event management, health and well-being, business administration, enterprise and construction. Women are inspired by their educational experience and many go on to gain economic independence once they start their chosen careers.

The good practice in detail

Reaching the learners

Most of the women recruited to courses come with few, or no, previous qualifications and are nervous about coming to 'college' because they feel that they are not 'clever enough' to benefit from further education and training. Although many have negative attitudes to education, they come because friends, relatives or neighbours have studied at BHE and have become role models and advocates. Managers and staff

ensure that new learners who contact BHE have a chance to talk with a personal tutor about their wishes and aspirations so that they can begin a course that meets their needs. This is effective because new learners feel immediately comfortable and have a consistent point of contact once they begin their studies.

Role models inspire new learners to enrol on courses and to then 'stick with it' by showing how their experiences and the skills they have gained at Blackburne House have enabled them to change their lives for the better. They do this through:

- celebrations of success
- graduation ceremonies
- job clubs
- visits to classrooms and workplaces
- case studies and displays.

Managers analyse data about their learners carefully to identify where they come from and where they live and then to identify the areas and groups that are under-represented. Staff then take time to visit other providers, community centres, shelters, support services and agencies across Liverpool to describe and explain what is on offer at Blackburne House. This means that they can target specific groups of learners such as:

- refugees
- those recovering from drug and alcohol abuse
- Black and minority ethnic women
- those who need additional support to access learning.

Through this analysis and their outreach work, managers find and target specific groups that most need addressing. For example, they noted that learning opportunities for women from the Chinese community were limited. Through additional meetings with community leaders and course leaders from local universities, staff prepared and delivered short courses in English culture and dialect to help these women engage better with their surroundings.

Getting the curriculum right

The courses on offer are chosen specifically to make sure that women develop the confidence and skills to progress to further or higher education, or into employment that meets the identified needs of local communities. Local employment needs are identified by working with local businesses. For example, strong partnerships with local and regional housing agencies showed that female tenants who needed property repairs and maintenance felt safer letting female workers into their homes. This led to BHE:

- setting up their own construction and maintenance social enterprise to employ women
- providing women-only courses in housing, construction and property maintenance
- forming partnerships with builders and other maintenance enterprises to offer work placements
- putting well-established plans into place to provide traineeships, supported internships and apprenticeships in building and construction.

To provide an environment in which learners can flourish, managers and executive and non-executive directors have set up other social enterprises such as:

- a café bar, where learners develop catering and customer service skills and experience
- a children's nursery, to support the development of learners wishing to pursue a career in health and social care
- a commercial spa, where learners taking courses in health and holistic and complementary therapies gain valuable work experience
- a conferences and events team that organises weddings, conferences and other social events in which learners participate.

These enterprises generate income and provide education, training and work placements to BHE learners. This means that many women get the skills and experience they need to get employment in similar enterprises or to set up their own small businesses.

Although local and regional prospects for employment have improved, many of the courses that women study lead to effective opportunities for self-employment. Consequently, BHG has secured the North West license to set up a school for social enterprise that supports business startups and business growth.

Health, well-being and social responsibility

Managers, staff and learners know that successful education and training is not just about knowledge and skills. Twice a year, the curriculum is extended so that learners and staff can work on the '[Headstrong programme](#)' of health and well-being. The aim is for learners to develop emotional resilience and social responsibility. The programme uses, for example, spa days, guest speakers, cultural events, exercise classes and confidence-building workshops to achieve this. It helps learners to secure their growing confidence and set targets for their lives, further education and employment. It also means that very high numbers of learners go on to complete their learning and training programmes.

The focus on social responsibility and emotional resilience has enhanced the curriculum and enriched the lives of the students, who become involved in social projects that include:

- massage and well-being sessions for cancer patients and staff in the Liverpool Women's Hospital
- maintenance, repair and painting and decorating services to improve the local environment.

Leadership and governance

Members of the board come from senior positions in education, training, commerce, industry, business start-ups, health and social care. They use their experience alongside the senior leadership team and ensure that everything BHG does has a positive impact on the women they serve. They do this by:

- attending regular 'strategy days' with the BHE leadership team to set targets for future development
- reviewing current and proposed programmes of learning, as well as current and future capital spending, against the values and ethos of BHG
- setting high standards and having high expectations of learners.

Board members use their knowledge and experience to support the employers' forum. This is part of the 'life blood' of the organisation, where the focus of employment is shaped with employers in the local community. It provides:

- support for traineeships and apprenticeships
- employment opportunities
- clear advice about future jobs growth
- support in finding additional funding for student support.

Making a difference

Students and staff are passionate about Blackburne House because everyone 'cares about learning and development'. Many students have gone on to gain higher level qualifications, including degrees. These ex-students support and encourage other women in the community to raise their aspirations, so in turn they can play an active part in their children's education, move on from minimum wage employment and improve the future life chances of their families.

BHE has made a difference to women and their families because:

- parents are more confident about their own learning, and get more involved with their children's learning, progression and achievement
- learners gain valuable skills that help them to gain employment, set up their own businesses or begin more advanced courses to improve their own learning
- they provide an environment in which learners feel safe and valued and develop strategies to stay healthy and become emotionally resilient

- learners contribute ideas to develop materials and resources that build on community interests.

One learner sums up how BHE has improved her life:

'I left school hating the education system. I was bullied and felt like a failure. I love to study here because we work in small groups and can get lots done. I began a level 2 course in IT and enjoyed it so much I went on to study at level 3. I work as a volunteer classroom assistant now, and am doing digital photography classes at night.'

Another learner, recovering from cancer, benefitted greatly from the support that staff provided:

'The course helped my recovery by helping me to be more creative. Through meditation, exercise and aromatherapy, I have the tools to rebuild my confidence. Because of this, I have begun a phased return to work.'

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

To view other good practice examples, go to: www.gov.uk/schools-colleges-childrens-services/inspections#good-practice.

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